

YEOMAN'S HOSPITAL

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Novels

JOANNA AT LITTLEFOLD
TADPOLE HALL
THE SWAN OF USK
PEOPLE IN CAGES
DUST OVER THE RUINS
HORNET'S NEST
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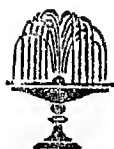
Biographies

WILLIAM AND DOROTHY
I HAD A SISTER

YEOMAN'S HOSPITAL

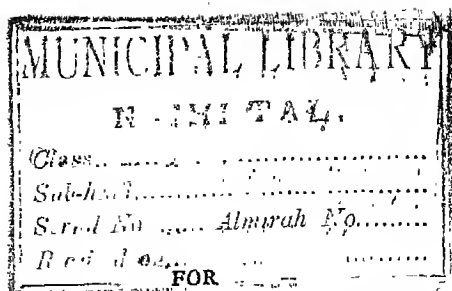
by

HELEN ASHTON



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48 PALL MALL LONDON

1944



RICHARD AND THEODORA WARNER

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Yeoman's Hospital exists only in the author's imagination. No reference is intended to any existing place or institution. The medical and nursing staff and the patients have been invented for the occasion and their names all signify a trade, calling or occupation.

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1944

YEOMAN'S HOSPITAL

Founded in 1825, under the will of Captain Ephraim Yeoman, master mariner. The foundation stone of the Nurses' Home and Jubilee Wing laid by Miss Alethea Ferriman in 1887.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

THE HONORARY STAFF:

Thomas Shoesmith, Esq., D.M., F.R.C.P., F.S.A., Senior Physician.

A. H. Taylor, Esq., F.R.C.S., Senior Surgeon.

Richard Groom, Esq., F.R.C.S., Junior Surgeon.

Robert Dyer, Esq., F.R.C.S., Aural Surgeon.

Neil Marriner, Esq., M.D., B.Ch., Pathologist.

And others.

THE RESIDENT STAFF, in December, 1943:

The Resident Surgical Officer, a Czech refugee doctor.

Miss Sophia Dean, M.B., B.Ch., house surgeon.

Richard Groom, Esq., junior, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., casualty officer.

Arthur Cook, Esq., M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., house physician.

THE NURSING STAFF:

Matron, Miss Barber.

The Sister of the Ferriman Nurses' Home.

Lister Ward: Sister Abbot; Dolly Clark, staff-nurse; Betty Carter, second year nurse; Nurse Miller, first year nurse; Joan Shepherd, probationer.

Sydenham Ward: Sister Priest; Elspeth Gow, staff-nurse; and others.

Other sisters and nurses in Syme, Linacre, Harvey, Jenner and Chamberlayne wards.

Theatre: Sister Harbinger; Nurse Webber; Mason, instrument man.

Casualty and Out-Patients : Sister Gater ; Nurse Capper ;
Miss Cutler, the lady almoner.

Night Staff : Sister Mercer ; Nurse Fisher ; Nurse Hooper ;
Rose Smith, a pupil-midwife ; and others.

Head Porter : Sergeant Forester.

Under Porters.: Wright, out-patients and casualty ; Sawyer,
night Porter.

THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT :

His Grace the Duke of Wilchester, K.G., President.

Frank Sawyer, Esq., Mayor of Wilchester, Chairman.

Philip Brewster, Esq., of Brewster's Paper Mill.

Councillor Miss Farmer.

John Ferriman, Esq., of Ferriman's Bank, Treasurer.

Medical Members : Dr. Shoesmith, Mr. Dyer, Mr. Groom.

The Rector of St. Blazey's Church, Chaplain to the Hospital,
and

Captain Chandler, M.C., Secretary-Superintendent of
Yeoman's Hospital.

PATIENTS :

Robert Burgess ; Pedlar, a shepherd ; Mrs. Glover and
others.

PERSONS living in or about the town of Wilchester :

Mrs. Groom, Mrs. Shoesmith, Mrs. Brewster, Miss Margery
Brewster and others.

*The whole action takes place during twenty-four hours
in December, 1943.*

CHAPTER ONE

I

It was a dumb dark winter's morning, cold as death and quiet as the grave, with a fog rising from the river to choke the streets of Wilchester town. The young policeman on his beat could scarcely see across the Beastmarket. As he went past St. Blazey's church he heard six o'clock strike, but he could not make out the face of the clock, or even see the top of the tower; only the gravestones looked white between the trunks of the leafless dripping beech-trees. When he crossed the road and peered through the railings of Yeoman's Hospital, the central block with its pillared portico was invisible across the courtyard. There was no light in there except the red tail-lamp of an ambulance parked by the steps and a faint glow through the blind of the porter's lodge, not bright enough for him to report. A slight movement by the gate resolved itself into one of the hospital cats, an old tabby with kittens to feed prowling round hunting for a mouse. She came and rubbed herself against his boots when he spoke to her, but it was too cold to linger and he tramped on as majestically as he could, beating his woollen gloves together to get some warmth in his fingers. He could hear an army convoy grinding along in the fog, down by the Abbot's Bridge, on its way to the neighbouring seaport and far overhead the insistent grumble of big bombers coming home from a raid. Both these noises were familiar enough in this fifth winter of the war, and he scarcely noticed them. Otherwise he could not hear a sound except the echo of his own footsteps on the greasy pavement as he walked down past the north wing of the hospital. He might have been the only living soul in Wilchester. He shuddered slightly, glanced up at the big building looming over him and thought jealously, "All asleep in their beds inside there, I reckon. Well, it's an ugly old place is Yeoman's, been standing there a great while now. One of these days I suppose they'll pull it down and build a better one." He turned the corner and went away down Abbot's Lane.

Inside the hospital, however, they had long turned night into day. In all the seven big wards, behind the black-out screens, the lights were burning and the patients had been roused from their uneasy morning slumber. Goggle-eyed and yawning, after the long restless night, they sat up among their pillows in Syme and Lister, in Linacre, Harvey and Sydenham, in Jenner and Chamberlayne. The night nurses had put away their knitting and their magazines and were scurrying from bed to bed with cups of strong brown tea and doses of salts, with bowls of hot soapy water, with wrist-watches, thermometers and fountain pens, trying to get through the morning rush before the day staff came on duty. "Roll over now," they urged the fretful patients. "Put this in your mouth. Drink up your tea, do, before it gets cold," and the patients groaned, "Oh! Nurse, is it morning already? I'd just got off to sleep."

Over in the nurses' home some seventy young women were wriggling into their uniforms. They left half the buttons of their thick blue cotton dresses undone behind yesterday's aprons, which still were clean enough for bedmaking; they struggled to pin apron-straps behind, to force studs through the white porcelain substance of collars and belts; they crammed caps and tied strings over half-combed hair and thrust their aching feet into hard sensible black-laced shoes. The frenzied clang of the breakfast bell at a quarter to seven put an end to the scramble. Doors banged up and down the corridors, you heard grumbling voices, scurrying feet and the rustle of starched linen as they all went crowding up the stairs to the dining-room. The black-out had not yet been taken down and the green oilcloth on the tables shone, the thick white crockery glittered under harsh unshaded electric bulbs; the urns bubbled and steamed. It was Monday, bacon morning and the bacon was salt, red and brittle, washed down with strong black tea and wedged with doorstep-slices of bread and margarine. Seventy hungry, hard-working young women crammed down as much as they could, eating against time before the next bell rang and Home-Sister, with her monkey face and her frizzed black hair, stood up to say grace in her lisping accents ("For what we have received, Lord make us truly thankful"), to give out notices and to announce changes of work. "Nurse Capper to go to Casualty," recited Home-Sister. "Nurse

Wright to Sydenham Ward . . . Nurse Shepherd to Lister Ward . . ." and so on down the list.

Joan Shepherd turned faintly pink as she recognised her own name. She was a new probationer, going on duty for the first time that morning and she had sat shyly by herself at the very bottom of her table, under the glaring light, too sick with fright to eat her breakfast. She was an unformed dewy creature, a leggy tall girl of eighteen in an excessively clean uniform, with a cap perched insecurely on a head of yellow hair, as soft as chicken-fluff. She had a scared rosy country face and her eyes were round and milkily blue as those of a very young kitten ; there was, however, a good width between them. She got to her feet uncertainly as she was approached by a lumpy rabbit-mouthed girl in glasses, sallow and plain, with an anxious stare and an awkward gait. "I'm Miller," said she. "Are you Shepherd?" and at Joan's scared nod clutched her by the arm and hustled her away across the foggy courtyard. "We're both on Lister, men's surgical. Do get a move on, in here, up these stairs and round to the right. Clark's the staff-nurse and she's down on you at once if you come in a minute after a quarter-past seven." She thrust impatiently at one leaf of a shining mahogany double door, so brightly polished that it reflected her hand ; it sighed open and the two girls hurried through.

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Young Joan's first impression was of light, the cold grey light of early morning staring in through five tall windows just uncovered on each side of the ward ; then of eyes staring at her, or so she fancied ; the eyes of thirty sleepy unshaven men, sitting up against crumpled pillows, under red blankets, the eyes of two young women standing together by the tiled table in the middle of the ward. One was Nurse Clark, the staff-nurse, fresh-coloured, buxom, immaculately clean, with not a hair out of place, looking as if she had been poured into her tight blue-and-white-striped uniform ; the other was Betty Carter, the plump bouncing black-eyed daughter of Mr. Carter, the ironmonger in Chepe Street, who had been head-girl at the high school last year. She gave Joan a slight welcoming look, Nurse Clark stared hard as the tall child advanced towards them with the gait of a long-legged foal on her father's farm, innocently awkward, hesitating and graceful, on the heels of the shambling Miller. "Don't dawdle about like that," said the staff-nurse briskly. "You're

both of you late on duty, that's no way to begin the day. We shall never get through the work if you hang about like that. Nurse Miller, go into the sluice and put out the dispensary bottles at once and then get on with the steriliser. There's no time to waste; we've all the beds to make and the ward to clean before Sister comes on duty. You; what's your name? Shepherd... you're the new pro, I suppose I've got to teach you everything. Take your cuffs off and help me with the beds on this side." She seemed in a furious temper about something or other.

Nurse Miller clumped off into the sluice, where the yawning night staff were stacking up the breakfast slices of bread-and-butter, packing their knitting and novels into their dispatch-cases and putting their capes round their shoulders; saying to one another, "Lord! what a night. Thank God that's over. Why can't the day staff come on duty at the proper time? What do you suppose there is for supper? Sister Tutor's got a lecture for us at ten-thirty, the only fine morning we've had for ages; it would be, wouldn't it? I do think we oughtn't to have to go to lectures in our off-duty time." They trooped out through the ward, casting incurious glances at the new probationer, who was making beds with the staff-nurse. There were thirty beds to make and it was a wild race against time. Joan had hoped that she knew how to do it; she had practised it time and again in Red Cross classes and over at the training school under the Sister-tutor, but here it seemed that she was too slow and too thorough. Nurse Clark was at her the whole time, "Now, then, nurse; turn down the blankets, loosen the sheets, roll the patient over to me. Straighten the mack and brush out those crumbs. Pull the draw-sheet through, roll it and tuck it under the mattress. Now lift him up, with me; not that way, for God's sake! put your arm through his like this and heave him up the bed. Shake up the pillow and put the open end away from the door. Turn the top sheet down the length of your forearm and tuck the blankets in; no, not like that, make an envelope corner. Didn't they even teach you to do that properly? What Lister would look like if one of you girls had charge of it I can't think. None of you have the least idea of how to make a bed."

She made Joan think of the picture in *Alice Through the Looking Glass*; the tight-lipped, tight-faced Red Queen with her braided hair, skimming the ground with the breathless Alice in tow. "*Faster, faster...*" thought young Joan absurdly, tugging and smoothing out crumpled linen, with

her breath giving out and her fluffy hair breaking loose under her crooked cap, as she tried to keep up with Nurse Clark. The beds had the smell of unquiet sleep in them, the wrinkled sheets were damp with the sweat of fever and pain. She was frightened of touching the patients for fear of hurting them, but Nurse Clark took them by the shoulders, rolled them over and pushed them about with an accustomed carelessness as if they were animals; she did not even wait to tell them what she wanted them to do. Joan had seen sheep and cattle handled in that way all her life about the farmyard, but never people. The men here were drowsy still, they groaned or yawned, but hardly spoke, they endured whatever was done for them with sleepy patience. The child smelt the sour smell of their bodies; but hardly dared to raise her eyes to their faces. For her, that first morning, there were only feet; one pair after another, calloused pale feet, young and damp, or old, dry and wrinkled, with horny nails and cramped toes, sticking meekly up together, scarcely looking human at all. Some of the men could get up and go paddling about the ward in an old dressing-gown and a pair of felt slippers, or at least sit grumbling under blankets in a chair. On those beds you saved one or two precious minutes, only to lose them again on the fracture-beds, where a man lay between sandbags under a gallows of timber, in a terrifying cats-cradle of pulleys, splints, weights and cords, groaning "Mind me leg . . . Oh! nurse; mind me leg."

In the darkest corner, in the last bed of all, was a man with his hands, arms and chest muffled up in dressings and no face to be seen, only a mask of lint with two gauze pads for eyes. "Not bedmaking again," sighed he. "I'd only just got off to sleep after they washed me. You girls might let a man sleep." It was such a young weary voice that it made Joan's hands slacken and her heart turn over in her breast. She looked timidly sideways at him, wondering what sort of a face he had behind all those dressings, but Nurse Clark pounced on her at once. "Now then, nurse, I've told you before, you didn't come here to stand about. Take that dirty linen down to the annexe and then ask Nurse Miller for a duster. The south side of the ward's your side; you've got to dust all the window sills and bedrails every morning and wash the tops of the lockers, before eight o'clock." The young man turned over on his side and buried his head in his pillow; Joan gathered up her bundle of sheets and toiled out with them to the kitchen. Clumsy Miller was there, boiling eggs and setting out trays, muttering to herself, "Oh!

dear, oh! dear; I'll never get through." She gazed round vaguely when asked where the dusters were kept. Then Betty Carter came whisking in, with a bottle of purple methylated spirits and a tin of powder. She had been rubbing backs and heels all round the ward. She was just as she had always been at school, friendly, a little patronising, anxious to show off, drawing, "Hallo, kid; I saw you when you came creeping in. What on earth made you come on duty late your first morning? Staff Nurse will have it in for you for that!"

Joan gulped down her fright; Miller said drearily, "It's me she hates. I can't do a thing right for her. I've properly got the wrong side of her, I have. I wish I was back at the mental hospital, that I do." She had, it seemed, done a year's training at the county mental hospital before she came to Yeoman's, "There wasn't all this rush and bustle," she sniffed, "and the patients didn't care what you did to them. I hate this ward."

Betty said cheerfully, "Mustn't tell the kid that yet. Let her find out for herself what she's in for," and Joan murmured, "I thought I was lucky to get to Sister Abbot's ward." "Oh, Sister's a grand old girl," agreed Betty, "but Staff Nurse is a devil. She knows her job all right, but she does put it across us girls." "She's got out of bed the wrong side this morning and no mistake," sighed Miller. "She's always awful on Mondays." Betty's eyes sparkled. "She's had a bit of news that's upset her," she asserted, leaning confidentially against the table. "Didn't you hear the latest? Young Mr. Groom is going to marry that Brewster girl. It's a fact, in the paper this morning." "Not really?" gaped Miller, laying down the breadknife. "Why, I thought . . . we all thought . . ." "She thought so too," said Betty, nodding her head up and down, "Ever since she was in Casualty last year he's been running after her. Why, when I was on night duty in Syme he was up there with her every night. He used to dodge Night Sister so that Clark could take him round and they always went into the kitchen and drank tea together. They used to shut the door so as not to disturb the patients and stay there for ages. Night Sister found out about it in the end and Clark was sent up to Matron. They've been a bit more careful since, but they've still been seeing each other. I know a bit about Clark, I can tell you," declared Betty, with her mysterious air. "She won't be pleased about this."

Then Nurse Clark herself came in like an east wind, with

her heels clacking on the tiled floor like castanets. "What on earth are you girls doing?" she demanded. "Standing gossiping in the kitchen at this time of the morning? If you haven't any work to do I can find you plenty. You haven't polished that steriliser properly, Nurse Miller; it looks as if it hadn't been touched for months. You'll have to go over it again before Sister comes. Nurse Carter, you've no business to be in here at all. Your side of the ward hasn't been dusted yet, I don't know what you think you're here for. I suppose you'd like the hospital to get in a charwoman to do your work for you. Nurse Shepherd, I thought I told you to get your dusters and brass-polish, five minutes ago." Joan faltered, "I didn't know where they were," and the staff-nurse exclaimed, "Christ! you've got a tongue in your head, haven't you? Can't you ask where things are kept?" She flung open a cupboard door. "Don't stand there making excuses," she snapped. "Go back into the ward, both of you. I don't know how we're ever to get through the work before Sister comes on duty," and she flung out again, evidently in a raging temper. The three girls exchanged looks. The innocent Joan appeared not so much frightened as startled and shocked, Miller was sullen, Betty Carter tossed her head and tried to preserve her amused, knowledgeable air. "What did I tell you?" she mouthed. "We shall all be for it this morning. Come on, kid; or she'll be after us again." She plunged into the cupboard, pulled out dusters and brass-rags and chivied Joan before her, back into the ward.

There Nurse Clark was already going from man to man shaking down thermometers, taking pulses, writing up her charts. The beds were all pulled out from the wall and a malevolent old wardmaid, as cross and crooked as a witch, was crawling about on hands and knees under them in a crumpled blue overall, with her mob cap crooked on her shaky head, muttering to herself, "Look what they done to my nice clean floor, with their nasty flower-vases and ash-trays and all." There were the men's ash-trays to empty and their lockers to tidy, while they eyed you with suspicion. "Don't you move nothing out of my locker, nurse," they said. "You leave it be." Joan ran to and fro, as the hands of the big clock over the door moved inexorably past each other and diverged again, she thought that she would never have finished before they stood at eight o'clock; but by some magic the last rail was dusted, the last ash-tray emptied, the last flower-vase carried away as the clock struck, the door opened and in came Sister Abbot, like a ship in full sail.

Joan Shepherd knew her already, just to speak to; she was the sister of jolly old Mr. Abbot, up at Crow's Nest Farm, on the downs, beside the great chalk encampment called the Giant's Castle, on the top of White Sheet Hill. His sister was very like him in build and face, a big healthy wholesome woman, with broad shoulders and big forearms, an old grey mare with plenty of work in her still. She had been nursing in Yeoman's Hospital for fifteen years and was senior to all the other sisters; she could have been matron, people said, but she hated office work and would not leave the wards. Lister, the men's surgical, had been her province as long as any one cared to remember.

The four young women stood in a demure row to meet her and said "Good-morning, Sister," like schoolchildren. "Why didn't you put your cuffs on, idiot?" added Betty Carter out of the corner of her mouth, to the new probationer at the end of the row. Joan flushed and put her hands behind her, conscious that Sister Abbot's motherly eyes had twinkled a little as she surveyed the pretty dishevelled creature in crumpled cap and apron. Nurse Clark handed up a prayer-book and the ward became suddenly quite silent. The men lay with eyes shut and open mouths and the sun blinked like a silver penny through the fog outside the windows as Sister Abbot began to read morning prayers. "*Oh! Lord, our heavenly Father, Almighty and Everlasting God, Who hast safely brought us to the beginning of this day: Defend us in the same with Thy mighty power and grant that this day we fall into no sin, neither run into any kind of danger, but that all our doings may be ordered by Thy governance, to do always that is righteous in Thy sight, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen,*" said Sister Abbot, in her clear comfortable voice, closing the book briskly and returning it to the staff nurse.

The word dropped like a pebble into the pool of silence and rippled it to its further corner. The patients moved and stirred, the kitchen door sighed open and the jingling breakfast trolley was run in on its rubber-tyred wheels. "Don't let me ever see you inside the ward again looking like that," said Nurse Clark, flouncing past Joan. "Your apron's soaking wet, your cap's made up wrong, and your hair looks as if you'd been dragged through a hedge backwards. I suppose you got up too late to look at yourself in the glass properly. Your hands are all over brass-polish too and you've got no cuffs on. I never saw such a sight. You'll have to learn t

keep yourself tidy here. I don't know what Sister can have thought of you, I'm sure." Blushing and stammering excuses, Joan looked over the angry young woman's head and saw Sister standing behind her. She gave the pair of them a somewhat thoughtful look; then went on her way round the beds with letters for the patients. "Don't stand gaping at me," concluded Nurse Clark. "You heard what I said, I suppose. No, there isn't time now for you to go and make yourself fit to be seen. All these breakfast trays have to be carried round and Nurse Miller can't do them by herself. You'll have to help her with the trays for your own side."

It was sausages that morning, mugs of brown steaming stewed tea and bread-and-margarine in slices, cut by the night-staff and already curling dry at the edges. Miller and she ran about with trays, while the patients grumbled, "Where's my egg, nurse? This egg ain't set, proper, just look at it running about me plate. I likes me eggs well done. The other nurse knew about it... Ain't there no bacon s-mornin'? Sausages ain't fit for a man to eat, these days; nothing in 'em but bread and pepper. They don't give us our rations proper in this place; we did ought to get our rations like other folk. 'Tisn't right to do us out of our food." Betty Carter, whisking by, flung out hasty warnings. "Don't sugar that man's tea; he's diabetic. He knows perfectly well he mustn't have any... Don't give Pedlar anything but a mug of tea; he's an operation case and so's the man next him..." A sulky youth with a broken jaw and his right arm in a cock-up splint, after a street fight, had to have his food cut up for him; the young man in the corner with his bandaged hands and his masked face asked her to hold a feeding-cup for him and she did her best, but she tilted it too much and the tea ran out and choked him. "Here, what do you think you're doing, messing up his bandages?" demanded Nurse Clark, in her sharp exasperated accent. "Really, you're perfectly hopeless. Leave him to me and go and clean out the annexes; they've got to be done before we close the ward."

Then it was the cold sluice, with the raw draught blowing through it. Joan toiled away, washed bowls and specimen glasses, scrubbed out baths and basins, polished brass taps and handles till her strong young arms ached and her hands reddened and swelled with the cold. Betty Carter ran in and out with piles of tin bowls and receivers, piling them into the hissing steriliser, crying, "My Lord, what a morning! Three theatre cases for this afternoon and all those dressings

to get through and it's Sister's morning off ; it would be ! " And Miller, clutching her cap, moaned, " I'll never get through ; Gosh ! I'll never get through. I've all those specimens to test still ; where are they ? Oh, my God ! you didn't throw them away, did you ? Whatever shall we do ? " Nurse Clark came in to bully her about the special diet trays. " Now then, Nurse Miller ; haven't you been down to the diet kitchen yet ? You know those trays have to be there by half-past nine, or there's trouble with the cooks. " " I haven't had time yet, nurse, " faltered the dull girl, with her eyes staring like a hare and her sallow skin flushed red. " You've had all the time there was, " retorted the staff-nurse. " I don't want any of your slovenly ways here. I suppose when you were at the mental hospital it didn't matter if you were punctual or not. But that won't do for us. " Hard, handsome and high-coloured, not a hair out of place, she vanished again and Miller groaned, " I'm sick of all these special diets for Mr. Groom's gastrics ; they ought to be on the medical side. I never can remember who's on milk and who's on eggs, by the time I've got down to the kitchen it's all gone out of my head. I wish I was back at the mental hospital, that I do. I liked it better than I like this place. " Sister Abbot put her head in at the door, looked all round with her wise old eyes, nodded and went off duty for the morning.

After that, for the new girl, it was endless fetching and carrying, lugging the red screens about, emptying and cleansing and polishing and putting away. " You've broken the button off your apron strap, you silly thing, " said Miller. " Here, take my safety-pin. " Betty Carter had three abdominal cases to wash, shave, paint with iodine and bandage up for the theatre ; Nurse Clark was giving Miller a dressing-down about her latest mistake, " Nurse, don't you know better than to let a man have an egg when he's on M. and B. ? Never let me see you do such a thing again. You'll be the death of somebody before you've done. If that's the way you're going to behave you're not wanted here. You'll never be any use. You're not fit to be a nurse, I can't trust you out of my sight, you can't do the simplest thing right for me. Why, this girl who's just come over from the training school would know better. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. They don't seem to have taught you anything at all at that mental hospital where you did your first-year's training. I suppose it didn't matter there if you killed a lunatic or two with your stupidity. Matron had better send you back there, I should think ; it's about all you're fit for ! "

She raised her shrill voice so that it could be heard all over the ward. She seemed to enjoy the relief of scolding the stupid girl before her, who sniffed and fidgeted, while the men raised their eyebrows and smiled or frowned at each other and the old witch of a cleaning woman leant on her polishing mop to enjoy the scene. "I don't wonder you're crying," finished Nurse Clark; "you've certainly got something to cry about this time." She flounced off to the table and sat down to write her report. Miller burst into tears and came blubbering out into the sluice, while the men hid themselves behind books and papers and the cleaner fell to pushing her mop about the boards.

"What's the matter now?" inquired Betty Carter, dashing yellow crystals into a jug for lemonade. "Has Staff-Nurse been telling you off again? 'Tisn't fair," but when she heard the story she said bluntly, "Well, you were a fool to let her see you do a thing like that. Didn't you know it was wrong?" "I can't remember everything," wailed stupid Miller in her loud common voice. "She never explains things properly, she only shouts and scolds. She puts me in such a dither, I can't think what I ought to do next. She won't leave me alone, she's always after me, she likes to see me get into a muddle. She's the rudest woman in this hospital, I hate the sight of her." She flung herself into one of the wooden chairs and wept openly. "It certainly is too bad the way she swears at you in front of the patients and the cleaner," Betty agreed, while young Joan stood round-eyed and open-mouthed. "She never gives you a chance to explain anything and she won't listen to any excuses. I don't mind being told off by Sister; she doesn't stand any nonsense, but she does show you where you've gone wrong, so that you can remember it another time. Staff-Nurse just raves at you as if you were a child of five." "She hates me," sobbed Miller, wiping her eyes; "she'd like to get me turned out of this place. She's quite right, I shall never be any use, I'd better go to Matron to-day and resign. I wish I was dead, that I do."

She flopped across the table, thrust out her elbow and swept a beaker full of bismuth off the table. "Crash" went the glass on the red-tiled floor and all the white powdery liquid was spilt. "Oh! my Lord," exclaimed Miller, with her fingers at her mouth and her round eyes staring. "Now you have done it," Betty Carter said crossly. "That was Number Seven's test-meal and now I'll have to mix it all over again. It's too bad of you, Miller." The old witch of a

cleaner came in groaning, " Oh ! me clean tiles, look at me clean tiles ! " and after her came the staff-nurse, demanding, " What was that ? " Then she saw the mess on the floor and Miller gaping at it. The girl's mouth and eyes were round black holes in her white face, she looked imbecile with fright. " Oh, it's you again, is it ? " said Nurse Clark. " I might have known. That's three things you've broken this month, it'll have to go down in the report." She marched out again and Betty Carter exclaimed, " Wipe it up at once, do ; Matron's just coming into the ward." She pushed Joan Shepherd out in front of her, while the wretched Miller dropped on her knees and began to pick up bits of broken glass. She sniffed and wiped her nose with the back of her hand and then she cut her finger. " You girls don't take no care of nothing," said the cleaner, getting out her bucket. " You did orter think of the work you make for other people. Ten minutes it took me to clean an' polish them-tiles an' look at the state they're in now."

5

Out in the ward, as by a miracle, everything had been set completely in order. The beds stood neatly over their own reflections on the polished floor. The red blankets and white sheets were turned down to an inch, the castors had all been faced inwards, the bed curtains moved gently in the wind from the balcony door, the glass and chromium plating of the trolleys glittered in the cold light of the winter morning. The place smelt faintly of drugs and floor polish, it looked as clean as a new pin.

Miss Barber, the matron, came round the ward with the staff-nurse. She was a very tall woman with a stately tread, not stout but very strongly built, who held herself extremely upright in her dark blue uniform and carried her pleated muslin cap as if it had been a crown. She had smooth hair, which must once have been straw-coloured, but now had faded to the colour of dust and her eyes were as palely blue and cold as aquamarines. They swept incuriously over the new nurse and made her shake in her shoes. The leggy child was conscious of her flushed face and ruffled hair, her crooked cap, and the safety-pins in her apron string. She had never been so frightened of anybody in her life. She flattened herself against the wall to let the two women go by. Betty Carter beside her said " Good-morning, Matron," in a dutiful voice, but she herself did not dare to open her mouth.

The two of them went into the kitchen and she waited, straining her ears to hear what was happening to Miller, but she heard nothing. Presently Matron came out again, looking more austere than ever and quitted the ward with the staff-nurse in attendance. "Thank God *that's* over and done with!" sighed Betty Carter. "Come on into the kitchen; there's just about time for a cup of tea. Then you go off duty till midday dinner." The tea at least was divinely hot, strong and reviving. The girls gulped it down thirstily and there were buns all round, warm and soft and with even a few currants in them. Suddenly there seemed to be time to draw your breath again. "Only Miss Dean this morning," said Betty Carter, swinging her legs from the table. "I heard Sister say so. Mr. Groom is giving his round a miss. It's a little way he has on operating days, the lazy old devil! There'll be a rush this afternoon with his three theatre cases; but Clark will be off till five, thank God! and Sister will be on again, that's something. How are you getting on, kid?" Joan faltered, "I don't know if I shall ever get used to it. Everything's so different from what I expected. There doesn't seem to be any real nursing to do." Miller groaned, "It's all hopeless," but Betty cried out, in her airy fashion, "Oh! you'll soon get into the swim of it. The first month is always the worst." She had been at Yeoman's Hospital herself for more than a year and had forgotten how strange she had felt at first; besides, she was never one to worry herself about other people's troubles.

CHAPTER TWO

I

OVER in the Ferriman House the yawning night nurses were finishing their supper; warmed-up stew it was and a thin rice pudding singularly unwelcome at that time of day, in the cold light of the foggy morning. Down at the front-gate of the hospital Sergeant Forester, the head-porter, arriving on duty, shrugged himself into his blue uniform coat; its brass buttons were engraved with the letters Y. and H. entwined. He stretch himself, yawned enormously and went out to tell the driver of the ambulance, who was rubbing up his lamps; "You'll have to move your bus, my lad; the doctors will be coming along with their cars presently. You

got no business blocking up the front courtyard." He stalked back into the lodge and began sorting the nurses' letters.

Round at the side entrance in Abbot's Lane, where the out-patients and casualty cases were admitted, Wright, the second porter, said "Good-morning," to the departing charwomen, trooping out in their day-clothes. He gave a final polish to the handles of the double doors and hid his cleaning-rags and polish in a secret corner of his own, for fear the cleaners should make off with them. He told off a dispensary boy for dropping a trail of castor-oil across the floor as he went by, gaily swinging his basket; "And you keep your greasy paws off my door-handles, see," he concluded for good measure. He sent his own boy across the yard for another bucket of coke for the casualty stove and he himself shook out and refolded the blankets on the stretcher and the two wheeled chairs. He took off his old grey cotton working jacket with the patched elbows and put on the blue jacket with the brass buttons. Then on the stroke of nine, he unlocked the doors and the out-patients began to shuffle in.

"New patients to the front benches," Wright intoned. "Ears to the right, eyes to the left," in his harsh grating voice. Monday was a slack morning for him, only a not very well-attended eye-clinic and the ear, nose and throat cases. That meant a pack of school-children, mostly sent in by the school medical officers because they ought to have their tonsils out; but this morning Mr. Dyer had gone up to London for a fortnight's holiday and young Mr. Groom, who would be seeing his cases for him, never troubled himself about other people's work. Wright knew that they would all be packed off again pretty quickly and told to come back in a fortnight's time. Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays were Wright's busy mornings with Mr. Groom's long row of surgical patients and old Dr. Shoesmith's chronic medical cases. "Ears to the right; eyes to the left," droned the porter. "Fetch your letters from the lady almoner; take your turn now, one at a time, no pushing. There's plenty of room for every one inside. What's the name again, Missus?"

He filled up cards with names and addresses, handed out forms, shepherded newcomers and welcomed many old acquaintances. He had been out-patient porter for more than twenty years, ever since the last war, which for him had remained the Great War. He had been wounded in the legs in that affair and had been a patient in Yeoman's for months at a time, while the surgeons picked bits of dead bone out of him and finally took off one leg above the knee. In

that war half of Yeoman's had been taken over for military patients. Wright considered that Yeoman's had made a good job of him. Though not a Wilchester man himself, he had been glad to get the job as porter; he had married a local woman and had stayed on ever since. He was one of the institutions of the place. He should have been head-porter, really, instead of fat lazy bullying Sergeant Forester, who did no work that he could avoid; but there had been some juggling about that. Captain Chandler, the secretary superintendent, himself something of a war-casualty and Dr. Shoesmith, the senior physician, who liked all odd characters, had both backed Wright for the job, but the Matron and the board of management had turned him down. The truth was that Sergeant Forester, who had served in his time in the Grenadier Guards, was a stout handsome fellow, getting on for six feet high, with a smart soldierly air, a ripe parade-ground voice and a good manner towards visitors; whereas Wright was an incurably untidy old man, who never seemed able to brush his hair so that it would lie down flat. It stood up straight all over his head like the fur of a grey squirrel, and he had a stubble of silver beard at all hours; besides, he limped about with a twisted gait and started off from the halt with a kick and a sideways jerk, for he had never properly learnt to manage his artificial leg. The board had decided that he would never make a sufficiently good appearance at the front door of the hospital and he remained at the side-entrance, where all the old out-patients knew him and he them.

There he sat, scratching away at the names and addresses, as the stream of people shuffled past him, the old men and women with their failing sight, the spectacled youngsters the anxious mothers and fretful scared children. "Well, Mrs. Deacon," said he, "how's Lily picking up after her operation?" and Mrs. Deacon, shifting the child she carried further up her weary arm, replied, "She don't seem to get on at all. We was awake with 'er all last night an' that ear-ole of 'ers, it keeps on a-runnin' an' a-runnin'; that it do. Mr. Dyer did order see it again, I reckon." "Mr. Dyer's gone for 'is 'oliday," said Wright. "Young Mr. Groom, he's on the job this morning," "I don't want nobody but Mr. Dyer," grumbled Mrs. Deacon. "That young doctor he ain't no good to nobody. Mr. Dyer done the operation, Mr. Dyer should see the child by rights." "Well, take it or leave it," the porter told her, looking sternly through his glasses, since the out-patients were always tiresome about wanting to see the doctor they knew. Mrs. Deacon sighed, "I was up

at six and come in by the early train ; can't afford to do that twice over. Reckon I'd best let somebody look at the child now we've got 'ere," and she pushed on after the rest.

2

In the out-patients' hall Sister Gater had been scurrying round for the last two hours, in difficulties with a new nurse who had just come on duty and did not yet know where anything was. The out-patient Sister was an extremely tall pale woman, with smooth bands of flaxen hair and the perfectly oval face of a Madonna ; her eye shone with a kindly but determined light. She had a deceptively mild and gentle air, but was in fact extremely efficient, had a will of iron and ran her complicated and difficult department like clockwork, year in, year out. She was intensely and narrowly religious and attended regularly in her off-duty time at the meeting house of the Plymouth Brethren, down Bridlesmith Passage. Her nurses all said that she treated them well, she was scrupulously considerate, knew just what she wanted from them and took pains to teach them whatever she could ; the only trouble was, she had a bee in her bonnet about men. " You mustn't let her see you having a joke with one of the doctors, whatever you do," Betty Carter had warned Nurse Capper. " She'll be down on you like a ton of bricks. That's how Clark first got herself into Matron's bad books ; Sister Gater told on her for ragging about with young Mr. Groom," and Nurse Capper, a light-hearted wench with all her wits about her, had replied, " She won't catch me doing that. I've no use for him. Clark can have him."

Nurse Capper was in her third year and had almost finished her training. She had been on night-duty for the last three months and the luck of the change-over had obliged her to come straight to casualty without the customary twenty-four hours leave in between ; however, the Night Sister, a kind old woman if ever there was one, had let her go to bed at midnight, so that she had snatched a few hours uneasy sleep. She was desperately drowsy this morning, however, and found it difficult to pick up the new routine. She could have dropped into place in a strange ward without much difficulty ; but down here everything was different. It was all holes and corners ; there was the big echoing out-patient hall in the middle, with its cross benches, its glass roof and its many doors. At one end were the porter's box, at the other the shuttered windows of the dispensary ; down

the sides were half a dozen small cubicles, the casualty room, the fracture and plaster room, the room where the dressings were done, the almoner's department, the examining rooms used by the medical staff. They had all to be put in order between seven-fifteen and nine in the morning ; floors swept, furniture dusted, clean towels and writing material laid out, inkpots filled, sterilisers lit and dressings laid ready. Brisk Nurse Capper, doing her best to seem as intelligent as she was, nevertheless did flounder a little more than she liked to do with a new Sister. She felt as if her head were stuffed with cotton wool and she could scarcely keep her hot and sticky eyes open. "But you'll get used to it quite quickly, I expect," said Sister Gater, with an obvious struggle to display Christian patience, "it's confusing at first, I suppose. Now that the patients have started to come in, you'd better tidy yourself up and put on a clean apron. We shall have Mr. Groom down presently."

Inside the dispensary, behind the shutters, all the lights were still on, though it was after nine, and the pale sun was beginning to penetrate the fog from the river. The dispensary used altogether too much electricity and the finance committee had made many complaints about it, but it was the darkest corner of the hospital and the dispensers maintained that unless they kept the lights on half the day they could not see what they were doing. This morning there was a full glare from a dozen unshaded bulbs, winking upon glass bottles and beakers, coloured liquids, polished brass taps and white china sinks. The dispensary staff were hard at work all down the long mahogany counter, making up the baskets of stock mixtures and dressings, one for each of the seven wards, and one each for casualty and the theatre. The nurses brought these baskets down at nine and came back for them at eleven. It was always a heavy piece of work and the dispensers would never open the shutters into the out-patients department until they had finished with it. "Where's that oxygen cylinder from Sydenham?" they said. "Sister should know that we can't send another up until we get one down in exchange . . . Why hasn't that basket come down from Chamberlayne? . . . Tell Sister Jenner we can't do afternoon orders, visiting staff or no visiting staff, unless the order book comes down by half-past three. Can't stop here all night dispensing special prescriptions . . ." They spent their lives in a perpetual feud with the nursing staff, trying to maintain such rules as these ; the dispensary was a shop where the customer was always wrong.

In the almoner's room Miss Cutler, that fat, overworked and cheerful woman, hung up her battered felt hat and tweed coat behind the door, put on the horn-rimmed glasses which made her eyes look like pebbles, uncapped her fountain-pen assumed the brisk professional smile which went with her morning's work. She was a local woman, the sister of the rector of St. Blazey's and she did not need the big map which hung on the wall behind her to teach her anything about the district served by Yeoman's Hospital; she carried all that in her head.

Wilchester town was the centre of an agricultural district, and the country people came in to Yeoman's Hospital from twenty miles round. The valley of the River Dodder, in which the town stood, was dull, flat, open and rather empty; the river went looping westward to the seaport at its mouth, a milky, chalky stream flowing through watercress beds and between drowned meadows, where lines of pollarded willows betrayed the wet ditches beneath. In winter the whole wide valley reflected the sky in sheets of standing floods. The villages on the banks of the Dodder all had names that spoke of wood and water; Marsh Chapel, Rushy Mead, Reedling, Alderbourne and Willow End, Waterhouse and Sheepwash. The Tadpole Brook, the Mill Brook and the Hazel Brook all flowed into the Dodder as it wound its way under St. Audrey's Bridge, past Fordings down to Sheepbridge-in-the-Vale. Beyond Sheepbridge, a minor market-town with a station and a cottage hospital, the valley was ringed about by the great rampart of the wolds. On those old sheepwalks the names of the villages were all pastoral; Lambscot and Littlefold, Wethercote and Ramsbourne, Nether Barton and Little Tithing, each tucked under the shoulder of a chalk down; most of them had been built where some clear spring came welling up between chalk and gravel running down to the Dodder in a stream strong enough to turn a mill. It was a barren country up there, a place of mighty earthworks, of lynchets and barrows, with always a wind blowing over them, and the villages had all grown smaller in the last hundred years since the sheepwalks fell into disuse. Down in the Dodder valley the farmers pastured dairy cattle in the rich water-meadows, grew fruit and raised corn. When there was an European war they ploughed the slopes of the downs up to the skyline, but between wars the rabbits and the gorse crept in again and the cornfields went back to grazing.

Wilchester town must have owed its earliest existence to the ford where a British trackway and later a Roman road, had crossed the Dodder. Roman legions had used the prehistoric earthworks on Ramsbury and Wetherbury hills for their camps and had left the grassy rings of an amphitheatre in the field by the river. This ruined and imperfect green circle, which the country people had called the Devil's Cheese Ring and had always used as a fairground, had survived until late into the fifties, when it was destroyed by the building of the railway. Wilchester had early become the chief town of the valley, and during the Middle Ages the monks of Wilchester Abbey had prospered greatly on the tolls and dues of the market-place and the bridge-crossing. Later the town had become the centre of the local wool-trade, and while the Castle on its tump fell into ruins, the fine stone houses of the wool-merchants began to adorn the narrow Wilchester streets, with their mediæval names. Many of these gabled houses still stood, or lurked behind modern shop-fronts, in the Beastmarket and the Clothmarket, in Laystall Street and Houndsgate, Castle Ditches and Abbot's Lane, in Bridlesmith Passage and on Dyer's Wharf.

The Beastmarket was dominated by the noble and empty parish church. It had what was in England a rare dedication, to Saint Blasius, Bishop and Martyr, the patron saint of the wool-trade and was often called Saint Blazey's by old-fashioned people, though nowadays it was usually referred to as the Minster. It owed most of its beauty to the devout benefactions of the fourteenth and fifteenth-century wool-staplers, cloth weavers and dyers, whose alabaster tombs adorned its chapels and whose brasses glimmered on its walls. The nine great windows had lost most of their original glass at the Reformation, and people complained that this made the church look pale and cold ; such a flood of light had never been intended by its builders.

The north window alone survived, in Saint Blazey's Chapel, which had formerly been the guild-chapel of the wool-merchants. It contained some excellent fifteenth century glass, supposedly of Flemish origin. In the centre was the figure of the patron saint, with crozier and mitre, carrying in his hand an iron wool-comb, the instrument of his martyrdom. He was flanked on one side by Saint Agnes, carrying a well-curled lamb and on the other by a much damaged male figure in sheepskins, possibly intended for Saint John the Baptist. This figure had been severely damaged and the faces of the other two saints had been shot

out and later replaced by clear glass. The lower part of the window depicted several lively scenes from the life of the saint. In one he sat at the mouth of a cave addressing a sermon to an attentive flock of sheep. In another he healed a choking child, in the third he obliged a wolf to restore a sucking-pig to a poor woman. The whole of this window was set in Perpendicular tracery of great beauty. It was a pity that it was in such a retired corner of the church.

Under the arches which sustained the tower a Flemish chandelier, with a hundred brass arms, turned slowly in the draughts which crept about the clerestory. The Minster was a very cold building, almost impossible to heat properly even in peace-time, and in war-time it was a penance to sit through a winter service there. The chancel was dark with Georgian mahogany panelling and there was a three-decker pulpit enriched with carved garlands of flowers and fruit. The exterior of the Minster was adorned all over with crockets, floriated stonework and coats of arms, but half of the noble tower had been shot away by General Fairfax in the Civil Wars, on his way to the siege of Oxford, and his men had hacked down most of the statues from their niches in the porch. The tower had never been repaired and remained a mere stump.

Behind the church was the well house of Saint Agnes, a mildly chalybeate spring at which the sickly young women of the neighbourhood had prayed for centuries, dropping crooked pins into the rusty slimy water and drinking and dabbling with their fingers as they prayed, "Holy Saint Agnes, send me a lover; send me a husband; send me a child." In the eighteenth century there had been an attempt by an ambitious physician of the town to develop Saint Agnes' Well into a spa for female complaints; but the scheme did not prosper. The town was too dull, the moist air of the river valley too relaxing and the journey from London too great for people of fashion to undertake it readily. Wilchester became, however, an important place on one of the main coach routes to the West of England. It boasted three excellent inns, the Fleece, the Woolpack and the Drover's Arms, while at one time Claypits Heath, just outside the town, was a notorious place for highwaymen. The Duke of Wilchester himself, on his way to his country seat, was held up there by Black Tom Fowler, and robbed of a gold watch and chain and twenty guineas. This booty the famous highwayman afterwards left at night on the hospital doorstep, in payment, said the accompanying scrawl, for

treatment which he had had there under a false name a year earlier. The hospital returned the watch and chain to the Duke, but kept the twenty guineas.

After the coaching days were over the town languished for a time, until revived by the building of the railway, when it became the chief station on a branch line connecting Oak-hanger with Greenfold Junction, on the main line to London. The railway came too late to save the wool-trade, which had long departed to the power looms of Yorkshire, but it brought into being Brewster's paper mills and a carpet factory revived and old dye works and greatly encouraged Ferriman's brewery and the brick fields. A new suburb came into being across the Abbot's Bridge, which had to be widened to accommodate modern traffic and lost the shrine on its centre span, in the process. Claypits was the name of this low-lying area which contained the gas-works, the railway station with its goods yard, and the carpet factory; while the angle between the canal and the river housed Brewster's paper-mill, the steam-laundry and the tanyard, all on Dyer's Wharf.

Beyond the last red houses of Claypits was a big market-garden and beyond that Claypits Heath, a tract of pine and heather with some pretentious new houses on it, stretched away across the valley until you came to the huts and barracks of Greenfold Camp and the camouflaged dumps and hangars of Lambscot Aerodrome. Out there, up the line towards London, in this fifth winter of the war, they were tearing up fields and pulling down farmhouses, adding acre to acre of the best land in the country to make a second aerodrome. It was not going to be a training-school, as Lambscot had been, but a bomber station, or so the country-folk believed; the runways, they told each other in awed whispers, were a mile long. "That's come to stop, I reckon," they said; "it won't never grow corn again. When the war's over and done with, folks'll fly from there to America." Nowadays the lanes by Littlefold were perilous with lorries, drivers tearing along with loads of bricks and timber, or dripping gravel from the Dodder bed.

All these different aspects of the countryside were represented in the wards and out-patient department of Yeoman's Hospital. Miss Cutler sat all day long in the almoner's room admitting and dismissing cases, adjusting contributions, inquiring into wages, discussing charitable societies, medical verdicts, operations, workmen's compensation cases and convalescent homes. A whole cross-section of the neighbourhood was spread out under her observant eye. From outlying

farms came cases of difficult childbirth, injuries caused by falls from ricks or tractors, by runaway horses and by other occasional accidents, besides the usual run of surgical emergencies, strangulated hernias, perforated appendices, mastoids and so forth, to keep the surgeons busy. From the damp river valley she got the bulk of Dr. Shoesmith's rheumatic cases, the children with St. Vitus's dance, sore throats and growing pains, the middle-aged folk with heart troubles, the old labourers with their knotted crippled joints ; besides the young consumptives from overcrowded cottages and the old people with cancer. The town sent her industrial accidents, fractures, crushes, burns, wounds and scalds got from mishaps with factory machinery ; besides the commoner medical and surgical ills. Mr. Groom, who specialised in gastric cases, found that bad teeth and poor food brought him plenty of these. Mr. Dyer got the bulk of his ear, nose and throat work from the town and village schools. Miss Dean, who was interested in orthopædic work, was always saying that Yeoman's Hospital ought to have a fracture-clinic for cases from the factories, besides its orthopædic work among the crippled children. The maternity ward took in such confinements as were too difficult for the country midwives and doctors, besides attending cases in the town itself and in the Claypits district ; it trained a whole crowd of midwife-pupils yearly.

Yeoman's Hospital had in this fifth winter of the war some two hundred beds in use, of which roughly a hundred and fifty were divided between the medical and the surgical side. Of the rest thirty were given over to the obstetric and gynæcological cases and the rest made up with Mr. Dyer's ear, nose and throat work and the children's ward. Miss Cutler could have filled them all ten times over. Like an amiable fat spider, she squatted at the centre of a web whose threads ran out into the farthest corners of the county. She sat from nine to five behind her big desk, among her day-sheets and case-papers, her registers and card-indexes, reciting the string of questions which made up her daily litany. "How much do you think you could pay? Will your society help you? Do you belong to our provident scheme? Have you got a letter from your panel doctor? Is there anybody who could look after the children for you if you have to come into hospital for an operation? How are you getting on since you went out? Did the district nurse come round to your dressing? Is that boy wearing his surgical boot regularly? What about baby's weight? Is that girl getting

all the fresh air she should? Are your new teeth comfortable? Will you stay now and see the doctor? When is your confinement due? Did you go before the public assistance committee as I told you to? Have you seen the school medical officer about her tonsils? When could you fetch that boy back from the convalescent home? Is your husband in work again? Didn't you get any compensation? When are you going to pay the next instalment on your glasses?" "Cheer up, son," she would say, "nobody's going to eat you . . . Don't cry, mother; we'll manage something. Give that baby to nurse and go along and get yourself a cup of tea . . . Don't look so worried; the doctors will put you right."

And from the dazed anxious ignorant men and women on the other side of the table she would receive the familiar responses, all day and every day. "I don't see as how we can pay it, that I don't . . . The man from the society he said they couldn't do no more for us. . . Well, we did belong to the provident scheme once, miss, but we didn't seem able to keep it up . . . Yes, my doctor, he did give me a letter, but coming off early like we did, I left it on the mantelpiece . . . Well, me sister might come and look after the kids while I'm away, but they never did seem to take to 'er and she ain't much of a cook. Jim, 'e never did like 'er cookin' . . . No, I ain't bin feelin' too grand since I come out; maybe I order see the doctor again. The pain come on again last week, something cruel . . . Yes, the district nurse dressed it for me, but she can't come no more than once a day . . . No, miss, 'e don't wear 'is boot reg-lar and that's the truth. I can't seem to kep 'im up to it. 'E says it rubs 'is leg an' besides, the other boys they makes fun of 'im . . . Baby doesn't put on weight like she should, I reckon I'll 'ave to stop feedin' 'er . . . No, she don't get out in the fresh air like Doctor said she ought. There ain't no garden where we live an' I'm out to work all day, so mostly she stops indoors. I've nobody to leave with 'er; I can't 'elp meself . . . No, I left me teeth at 'ome in the table drawer. I can't seem to get used to 'em, like . . . Oh! no, miss; I couldn't stop an' see the doctor this afternoon. There's nobody to give the kids their dinner when they come back from school. Besides, I'm not prepared . . . Mid-April, I reckon the baby's due an' the doctor says I've got to come inside for it. A lot of trouble I 'ad, with me last; you don't want to go through that again, missus, 'e says to me. You go to Yeoman's an' they'll fix you up for a bed when your

time comes. Tell 'em I sent you . . . Yes, I went before the committee an' told 'em 'ow we was fixed an' they done what they could for us, but I don't see 'ow we can make ends meet, that I don't . . . No, miss, I told the school doctor, You leave 'er throat alone, I told 'er. All my children gets sore throats in the winter, livin' down by the canal ; it's only to be expected. She isn't goin' to 'ave 'er tonsils out, are you, ducks ? Not likely . . . Tuesday, I could go over an' fetch Jimmy. Miss Brewster, she's promised to drive me, if you'll sign the paper . . . No' my old man, 'e's laid off again, not a penny come in this week . . . Well, miss, there seems to be somethin' gone wrong about that there compensation. I've wrote and I've wrote, but they say there's nothin' comin' to me. You see, I wasn't exactly at work when I fell off the ladder . . . Well, I did intend to pay a bit more to-day on me glasses, but Tom's sick again an' we're all be'ind 'and, like. Dear knows, I can't tell where to find the money . . . You naughty boy, I'll 'ave somethin' to say to you when I get you back 'ome. Whatever folks'll think of you I can't imagine. Excuse 'im please, miss ; I'm that ashamed of 'im. Now, Jimmy, give over, do . . . Oh, miss ! I do feel so bad. Two mortal 'ours I bin waitin' an' I come off without me breakfast. I can't go in an' see the doctor ; I've come over all queer-like . . . Oh ! don't say that, miss, I can't stand another operation. What'll I do ? What'll the children do ? What's to become of us all ? " That was how it went day in, day out, in the almoner's room. Dr. Shoesmith, the senior physician of Yeoman's Hospital was wont to say, " Miss Cutler knows more about the ultimate causes of disease than any of us doctors " ; and if by this he meant poverty, malnutrition, anxiety, overcrowding and dirt he was probably right.

CHAPTER THREE

I

THERE WAS a dreary little room, off the front hall, where the resident staff of Yeoman's Hospital ate their meals and spent their off-time. It was severely furnished with a set of Victorian chairs in black buttoned leather, a mahogany writing-table under the window cluttered up with certificates, notebooks, medical catalogues and so forth, a bookcase

crammed with tattered text books and a row of pegs behind the doors, where white linen coats hung ready, with stethoscopes dangling out of the pockets. The big centre table was still spread with the remains of a war-time breakfast, and the gas-fire was roaring blue in the grate; the walls were covered, edge to edge, with framed and faded photographs of former hospital staff groups. In this bleak sanctum, under the unshaded light, the resident staff were about to disperse for the morning's work. There were four of them at this time; Sophia Dean, the house surgeon; Arthur Cook, the house physician, a very smug young man, only just qualified; Dick Groom, the casualty officer, called young Mr. Groom to distinguish him from his father, Richard Groom, the honorary surgeon; and last of all a little cat-faced elderly Czech refugee, whose name few people attempted to pronounce. He had the post of Resident Surgical Officer and was senior to the three young people, but his appointment was just about to run out. It was supposed that when he went either Miss Dean or Dick Groom would succeed him, but nobody yet knew which of them the hospital board would choose.

This morning they were all politely congratulating Dick Groom on his engagement, and he was carrying off the situation as best he might, with a somewhat heightened colour and a louder laugh than usual. He was a lazy, powerful, stupid young man, getting on for thirty, with broad shoulders and a thrusting walk. Most of the junior nurses thought him handsome, and indeed he was not at all bad-looking in a dark florid style, though like his father he had rather a common air. He was well built too, though he complained that nowadays he could not keep his weight down. He did not get enough exercise, he said; before the war he had been a good tennis-player and a vigorous dancer and had played football for his hospital. When the war began he had not long been qualified and had gone into the army medical service for a time; he had even been out in France for some months during that first uneventful winter. Then he had developed some trouble with an old football knee and had been sent back to England for treatment, just in time to miss the invasion of the Low Countries and the retreat to Dunkirk. He had put in some time at a military hospital in the North of England; then his father had pulled a string or two and Dick had reappeared in Wilchester. He no longer wore uniform and there was still supposed to be something the matter with that knee of his. It served him

as an excuse for an occasional visit to a London specialist, but so far he had not been passed fit for active service. Nobody thought that he was fretting very much about that. He had amused himself very well for a time with the handsome staff-nurse, Dolly Clark; but he had never intended to commit the common young doctor's folly of marrying a pretty nurse and, when he found that the affair was becoming too much a matter of hospital gossip, he drew off and began to look about him for a suitable wife among the local girls.

In the fifth winter of the war the available field was diminished. The daughters of the impoverished county families, who would have danced and played tennis with him in peace-time, had mostly gone off to the women's services, to the various ministries, or to nursing overseas. Dick Groom paired off in the end with the daughter of Philip Brewster, who owned the big paper-mills down by the River Dodder. Margery Brewster was no beauty, but she was pleasant and sensible and very much in love with him, though she had known him all her life. She had a good business head and acted as her father's secretary at the mill, that was how she had escaped the call-up. Though she was the eldest of a long family, she was her father's favourite child and there would be plenty of money if she married a man who would keep on the right side of him. Dick Groom had taken some pains to get on with old Brewster and he flattered himself that he had done it, or else Margery had managed it for him. Philip Brewster was a considerable figure in local affairs, had been three times Mayor of Wilchester, was still on the town council and had sat on the board of management for as long as any one could remember; he was popularly supposed to have Yeoman's Hospital in his pocket. The engagement had been in the air for some weeks and in the papers that morning. Dick Groom warded off Arthur Cook's congratulations with the proper beaming fatuity, but he was very well pleased with himself all the same. "You're a lucky chap," said young Cook with a meaning air and Dick responded, in his loud cheerful voice, "Don't I know it?"

Then it was Miss Dean's turn and she said all the proper things to Dick in her pleasant polite way. She was a good-looking girl, if you admired a neat chestnut head, a pale face and regular features, which Dick did not; also she had charming manners, a great air of youthful dignity and behind these a will of iron and she had no use for Dick at all. When she first arrived at Yeoman's Hospital, to succeed him as his father's house surgeon, he had cast his roving eye over her

and made one or two idle advances, as he would have done to any other handsome girl in her place; but Sophia had pulled him up very short. She could not abide him, and he for his part disliked her intensely. He was not accustomed to being held at arm's length by young women. His peculiar lazy charm had hitherto served him well enough, whenever he chose to exert it, and it piqued him that he could never get Sophia to be more than decently civil to him. "Well," he said to himself, "maybe she sees now there's one girl in this town who doesn't turn up her nose at me." Sophia meanwhile was assuring him, "We all like Miss Brewster so much. She's so sensible and so kind and we're all so grateful to her for the way she manages that car pool." She and Margery had met over the complicated and troublesome system by which patients, without other means of transport, were brought in to Yeoman's by volunteer drivers from the outlying villages. Margery Brewster, who was an admirable organiser, somehow managed in the intervals of her own busy day to keep this organisation running smoothly, and Sophia respected her for it. "I do hope you'll both be very happy," she concluded, in her pretty, formal accents, though without any marked enthusiasm. Dick got the impression that she thought Margery a little too good for him.

The little cat-faced Czech muttered something to the same effect, eyeing the clock and shrugging on his white coat. You could not expect him to be very generous in his felicitations to young people. His own wife and family were lost to him somewhere in Central Europe; he did not know whether they were alive or dead and he did not much like Dick Groom in any case. "Good luck, young man," said the man whose luck had been all bad lately and he picked up his stethoscope and walked out. "Surly devil," said Dick resentfully as the door shut behind him; and "you'll get his job now, I expect," put in little Cook. His smug round choir-boy's face shone with mischief. He grinned gently, looking from the young man to the girl, while Dick scowled at him uncomfortably.

The Czech doctor's appointment, the senior resident post would run out in another six weeks; it was for a year and it would carry Dick on nicely to the date at which old Mr. Taylor, the senior honorary surgeon, was going to retire. Then his own father would move up into Mr. Taylor's place and young Dick might reasonably hope to step into his shoes as one of the junior honorary surgeons. He would be settled for life then, could go into partnership with his father and

quietly inherit the bulk of the older man's town and county consultant work. . All Dick's plans for his comfortable future rested on this corner stone and he had persuaded himself, perhaps a little too easily, that he had the job in his pocket. There seemed to be nobody else in the running until Sophia Dean turned up.

She belonged to what Dick and his father, in their private deliberations, called the Shoesmith crowd. There was a long-standing rivalry between Dick's father and the senior physician, Dr. Thomas Shoesmith, which had gradually extended itself until it divided the hospital from top to bottom. The two men were both of them extremely strong characters, opposed in every way and they had spent the greater part of their professional lives at Yeoman's Hospital; Richard Groom had been on the honorary staff for twenty years, old Dr. Shoesmith for more than thirty. Professionally, they had a wholesome respect for each other, but individually they could never agree. Their clashes had an electric violence and certainty; as Dick said, "Whenever my old man and Daddy Shoesmith get across one another, you can fairly see the sparks fly." This rivalry had become the spice of life to the pair of them, enlivening their dull routine. In the wards or the out-patient department they politely disputed the possession of obscure or interesting cases, accepting the transfer of patients between the medical and surgical side with reluctance. In the theatre Mr. Groom would complain, "This case has been kept hanging about in the medical wards far too long"; while old Tom Shoesmith would grumble to his house-physician as he went his rounds, "No use sending this fellow over the way, to be chopped about by the surgeons, when a little expectant treatment will do wonders for him."

In private practice these gentlemen were obliged to meet in consultation half a dozen times a year in and about Wilchester. Mr. Groom was accustomed on these occasions to admit crossly to the general practitioner in charge of the case, "Well, if you want a medical opinion I suppose you may as well call in Shoesmith as usual"; while old Tom would grumble for his part, "If it's got to come to an operation of course there's nobody better than Richard Groom." The hospital board of management was, however, their chief battleground. They were both members of long standing and they automatically took opposite sides on any question which might come up, disputing all problems of hospital policy and finance, intriguing quietly against each

other to secure the most efficient of the nursing staff for their own wards, and supporting different candidates for any vacant appointment. The struggle had been going on for years ; it was like an endless game of chess, they played for points so vague that it was impossible to say who was leading, but they competed for all they were worth. The cleavage between them had spread slowly until it involved most of the members of the permanent hospital staff, and newcomers found themselves drawn to one side or the other. It was an absurd situation, but it looked like coming to a head finally over the question of Dick Groom and his future.

Dick was beginning to think that Sophia Dean had been imported by old Daddy Shoesmith with the precise intention of queering his pitch. She had turned up five months earlier, with admirable testimonials, and the board of management had chosen her to succeed Dick as his father's house surgeon, with only some formal opposition from Mr. Groom, who had no candidate of his own to put forward at the time and was reserving his fire for the coming struggle about Dick's future. Dick had grumbled afterwards, "That girl never ought to have been let in," but at the time he had not thought twice about her. True, she came from St. Catherine's, which earmarked her as Dr. Shoesmith's choice, but then the big London hospital had always provided Yeoman's with a good many of its junior residents. Dr. Shoesmith himself had had his training there, getting on for forty years ago and had always kept in touch with his old medical school. There had been a steady trickle of newly-qualified young men coming down from St. Catherine's with brand-new degrees, in a state of comparative professional ignorance, to rub off a few corners and get a little experience before venturing into practice on their own. Of late years there had been one or two young women, who had not done worse than the rest. Several of these St. Catherine's importations had settled in private practice in and about Wilchester. Fat little Mr. Dyer himself, the ear, nose and throat surgeon, had come to Wilchester first in that way. He had been on the honorary staff now for ten years, He was very good at his job and everybody liked him, even the Grooms, though he definitely counted as one of the Shoesmith party, when it came to any disagreement.

Dr. Marriner, the hospital pathologist, was another specimen off the same shelf, a quite extraordinarily disagreeable young man, though uncommonly clever. It was said, and with truth, that he had only just missed his chance of

being chosen Director of the Pathological Department of St. Catherine's; he was as good as that and certainly a little too good for a small provincial hospital like Yeoman's. His professional colleagues admitted that, supposing among themselves that his quick temper and bad manners had spoilt his chances up in London. He was Dr. Shoesmith's own nephew, the youngest son of a sister of old Tom's, long dead; you could say, if you chose, that his uncle had landed the job for him. Very few people in Yeoman's could get on with Neil Marriner, but it did not after all matter much how sulky or hot-tempered he was. He sat all day long by himself, up in his laboratory under the hospital roof, messing about with his slides and stains, his test-tubes and distillations; only occasionally did he emerge to stalk through the wards with his cantankerous air, in search of clinical material. He set everybody by the ears. The sisters did not like him, because he was fussy and particular, knew exactly what he wanted done and did not care how much trouble he gave them. The younger nurses were frightened of his sarcasm and annoyed because he never seemed to know them apart. The patients found him cold and unsympathetic; he was vexed by their stupidity and cut them short in their rambling histories and explanations. "Marriner is a clever devil," admitted Dick Groom, "but he's too clever by half. People won't stand the way he looks at them." He himself could not abide that enigmatic stare of Neil Marriner's; the fellow had a way of looking right through you, as if he wondered what unknown substance you had in your skull, in the place where your brain ought to be. "I can't stand Marriner," Dick would say, after any encounter between them, "and no more can anybody else. If he wasn't old Daddy Shoesmith's nephew he wouldn't keep his job a month." This, however, was little more than wishful thinking. The board of management knew that they had been lucky to get a man like Dr. Marriner for Yeoman's and they were ready to overlook his bad manners as long as he was prepared to stay in Wilchester.

Sophia Dean herself was as clever as she could be; to tell the truth, her qualifications were better than Dick's and she was uncommonly keen on surgery. Dick himself was a neat and pretty operator, like his father, but Sophia was something more. She was, besides, handsome, agreeable and had the art of making friends easily; most people at Yeoman's seemed to like the young woman very much. The post of R.S.O. was not really good enough for her and Dick sometimes tried to comfort himself with the theory that she would

not trouble to put in for it when the time came. It was only a tuppenny-halfpenny job in a second-rate provincial hospital, when all was said and done; but then if you were a woman you had to be twice as good as a man before you could beat him in an open field. Sophia and old Shoesmith between them might easily have worked out exactly the same calculation as Dick had done, about a permanent position on the honorary staff of Yeoman's and a consulting practice in and about Wilchester. There were plenty of people in the town who could give her useful backing; people who did not like the Grooms, father or son, and might even go the lengths of preferring a woman doctor. Dick was honestly worried about Sophia Dean; he would have given a year's pay, there and then, to know what her intentions were.

So when Arthur Cook said to him, as the door shut behind the Czech doctor, "You'll get his job now, I expect," Dick did not turn off the remark as easily as he should have done. He could not for the life of him keep from glancing at Sophia to find out whether she was listening, but he could not tell. She was standing by the table, running her finger down a list of admissions to see whether there was anything new in Lister. He could only see her bent chestnut head and the delicate line of her neck turned away from him. "Oh! I don't know about that," said Dick hastily. "Mustn't count on it, you never know how things will turn out." "You'll land the job all right; don't you worry," said young cook, also watching the girl with his rather spiteful and knowing air. "Brewster's got the board in his pocket and your old man's on the honorary staff; you've all the pull you want, surely. Why, you've got it in the bag." Dick reddened and retorted, with a loud, cheerful, but not quite natural laugh, "There might be other people in for it," but he did not draw any comment from Sophia. She turned round quite naturally, went to the rows of pegs behind the door and began to put on her white coat. "I must be getting along," said she cheerfully. "I've got to do your father's beds for him as well as Mr. Taylor's this morning. He rang up to say that he couldn't manage his round, or the board meeting either."

"He's got something more important on hand to-day than passing hospital accounts," said Dick. "He's gone out to the Castle for a consultation with a couple of London specialists. The old Duke's worse again, he may have to have another operation." He always liked to boast a little about the Duke of Wilchester, President of Yeoman's Hospital and his father's most important local patient.

Sophia, who had heard about the matter before, remarked, "I shouldn't think the old man would stand that, would he? I sometimes think we ought to let those cases die in peace"; but Dick replied, staring, "Oh! well, you can't expect my father not to have a try; after all, it would be a feather in his cap if he could keep the Duke alive for another six months. It couldn't be more." He knocked out his pipe and got into his own white coat, grumbling, "Well, got to get down to casualty, I suppose. Dyer's on holiday still and I'm landed with all his ear, nose and throat cases on top of my own work this morning." Little Cook thought what a bad temper the other two were in to-day. He told the pair of them irreverently, "You're lucky! I only wish old Daddy Shoemith would miss a round sometimes, but I shouldn't think he's ever done such a thing in his life. I shall be standing first on one foot and then on the other from now till lunch-time, while he goes over every single heart in Linacre and Sydenham. I could get round his beds in half the time." He stood grinning cheerfully, swinging his stethoscope, consoling himself with the reflection, "Only a few more weeks of it; then I'm off to the Air Force, with luck. It's my afternoon off, that's one comfort." Dick interrupted, "Oh! I say, I forgot to ask you. Do you mind taking over for me between two and four this afternoon? I'll do the same for you to-morrow." Arthur Cook's round face clouded; he hated changing his off-duty time, and Dick was a little too prone to alter their time-table to suit himself at short notice, a peculiarly irritating trick. "Oh! look here, you said you were taking the evening out too," he objected. "Well, I've got to dine with the Brewsters," Dick confessed. "We're all going up there to celebrate the engagement. I can't get out of that; but now Margery's rung up wanting me to come with her and look over Dr. Painter's house in Friar's Entry. She thinks it might do for us and you know how you've got to snap up a house these days, the minute it comes into the market. She made a muddle of the day, thought I got my afternoon off on Monday this week. She's told the old gentleman we'll be there at half-past two." As the boy still looked vexed, Dick offered, "Why not take a half-day to-morrow instead and I'll stop in for you? Old What's-his-name won't care how we arrange the times between ourselves, so long as there's somebody on the job." He would not have dared to make the suggestion to Sophia, but Arthur Cook was a good-tempered little fellow and it did not make very much

difference to him, since he knew nobody in Wilchester and had nothing particular to do when he was off-duty. When Dick pleaded, "After all, one doesn't get engaged every day," he gave in. "I'll be back by four at latest," Dick promised, "just in case I'm wanted for an odd anæsthetic, or anything of that kind. You won't be late in the theatre this afternoon, will you, Miss Dean?" Sophia shook her head. "Not unless you send up anything new off the gate," said she.

It struck him that she was looking vexed, and at first he did not know why. Then he realised that she had turned round with her hand on the door, in the act of opening it, when she heard him speak of Dr. Painter's house. He could not for the moment imagine why it should interest her; then, as Arthur Cook inquired idly, "Is that the house Marriner said might do for him?" he guessed all of a sudden what was the matter with her. Marriner and she must be going to make a match of it after all and they wanted the house in Friar's Entry themselves.

It made him open his eyes wide. Sophia Dean had been a disappointment to him from the first. He had too hastily supposed that a girl of her colour, with such a lively eye and so generous a mouth, would afford him at any rate a little temporary amusement; he hated even now to remember how promptly she had put him in his place. Arthur Cook had remarked at the time with his malicious air, "You and Miss Dean don't seem to hit it off as well as you might." Dick had retorted, "That girl hasn't any use for men. She's got her head stuffed full of book-learning, she's no fun at all" and Arthur Cook had idly agreed, "I shouldn't wonder." However, Dick had not been certain, even then, that he had got Sophia into the right pigeonhole; and when he made the same comment to Dolly Clark, over the tea-cups, on night duty, up in the ward kitchen in Syme, she had contradicted him instantly. "That's not her trouble," she declared with authority. "If you can't make her pay any attention to you, Dick, it's because she's got somebody else in her head."

Then she had astonished him by declaring, "That girl came down here after Dr. Marriner." Dick hadn't believed her at the time. The nurses were always gossiping, it was the spice of life to them in that enclosed place. He had provided a good deal of material himself, in his time, for their light-hearted malice. "Sounds like one of the stories you girls cook up on night-duty," he had told Dolly. "Of course they knew one another up at St. Catherine's, must have done; but I don't believe there's any-

thing more in it than that." To do Dick justice, he was not one to spread gossip ; he was too stupid to take in a situation unless it was thrust under his nose and too easy-going to repeat a tale. Arthur Cook, with his sharp eyes, narrow mind and malicious nature, would do more mischief in a month than Dick would in a year. Dolly knew that and merely retorted, with a toss of her cap, " If you had eyes in your head, you'd know how often Miss Dean goes up to the path-lab."

Dick had always a wholesome respect for Dolly's judgment and after that he watched Sophia's movements with interest for some time, but he could not for the life of him make out that she had more errands to the laboratory than anybody else. He did fancy, when he came to think it over, that the resident's lunch had been blighted rather more frequently than usual by the sandy, bony, disagreeable presence of Dr. Marriner ; but after all the man was entitled to feed there whenever he chose, though on his busy days he usually annoyed the Home Sister by sending down for sandwiches, or bread and cheese, instead of coming to table to eat the meal provided for him. He did perhaps appear rather more regularly for a time after Miss Dean's arrival and show himself a trifle less disagreeable than usual, but he and the girl did not seem unduly friendly. They found something to argue about at every meal and attacked one another with such a lively exchange of opinions and home-truths that any argument of theirs was hardly distinguishable from an ordinary quarrel. The Czech doctor appeared to find these discussions stimulating, but Dick complained privately to Arthur Cook, " I wish those two would keep quiet and let us eat our food in peace."

However, Dr. Marriner presently struck another busy patch, ceased to put in an appearance at the midday meal and left a standing order for sandwiches with the kitchen staff. Dick decided hastily that the whole affair was a mare's nest of Dolly's. She was off night-duty by this time. Matron for her own reasons had shifted her to be staff-nurse on day-duty to Lister, and Dick, on casualty duty down in the out-patient's hall, would have been hard put to it to find an excuse to see the girl, even if he had not just then decided to break off with her and engage himself to Margery Brewster. Now, however, the whole story came back to him in a rush, as he saw Sophia's hand drop from the door-handle. " I didn't know Marriner wanted a house," said he hastily, as he met her eye.

" He was talking about it one day last week," said Arthur Cook, swinging his stethoscope. " Said he was sick of his

lodgings and wanted to set up housekeeping on his own." And he added, with idle mischief, "Maybe Marriner wants to get married himself. I wouldn't know anything about that. Perhaps Miss Dean does." He grinned at Sophia with cheerful impudence, as if he shared Dolly Clark's theory about her.

Sophia gave him a straight look and demanded, "Why should I?" The boy shrugged his shoulders and when she continued to stare at him mumbled, with a trifle less self assurance, "I only meant you've known Marriner longer than the rest of us. He might have said something to you about his plans." Sophia made no reply, though she looked thoroughly put about, an unusual thing for such a composed young woman. Arthur Cook said to Dick, "Sounds as if you'd better get cracking about that house, anyhow;" and Dick agreed hastily, "Thanks; I'll get round there with Margery this afternoon, if you'll hold things down for me in casualty." Then he glanced sideways out of the window into the courtyard and was able to end what had become a slightly awkward situation by exclaiming, "There's Daddy Shoesmith just parking his car. You'd better double along to the front, my lad; or you'll find yourself in trouble."

Arthur Cook cried out, "Good Lord! is it as late as that?" and bolted out of the door like a rabbit, glad enough to get away. As he crossed the black-and-white marble pavement of the front hall he said to himself ruefully, "Well, I put my foot in it properly that time and no mistake. A hell of a temper that girl's got! Wild cats aren't in it. She can't see a joke against herself, ever. I shall have to mind what I say to her about Marriner. Anyhow, there must be something in it. As for Groom, I'm dead sick of the way he shoulders all his work on to me these days. Another time I won't play; I've had enough of it. Well, thank God I'll be out of this place in six weeks." He sleeked down his fair hair, straightened his white coat and assumed an air of demure affability as old Dr. Shoesmith shouldered his way through the double doors. "Good-morning, sir," said Cook, looking as if butter would hardly melt in his mouth and the senior physician replied, "Good-morning, Cook. How's that auricular fibrillation in Linacre?"

Sophia Dean and Dick Groom meanwhile went down the corridor together, he on his way to the out-patient and casualty department across the courtyard, she making for the side staircase which led up to Syme and Lister, the surgical wards. Dick wished heartily that he knew what was going

on inside the girl's smooth chestnut head, but that he never could tell. They did not talk to each other at all as they went down the long tiled passage. Sophia walked along thoughtfully, looking at the ground; Dick was staring vexedly at a figure coming towards them from the far end of the corridor, a buxom quick-moving young woman in staff-nurse's uniform, only too familiar to him. "Hell!" he said to himself, "isn't that just my luck? to run into Dolly at this time of the morning, when she ought to be safe in Lister." The staff-nurse was the last person he wanted to see, with his engagement to Margery just made public, and his own explanation of it still to be gone through with her. The three young people met at the foot of the stairs and Dick prepared to slip by the two girls, muttering something hastily about it's being past ten. He heard Miss Dean say to Dolly, in her polite and pleasant way, "Good-morning, nurse; I'm just coming up to do my round in Lister"; and Dolly replied, "Yes, Miss Dean, Sister's off duty, but she left a message for you about those X-ray plates of Pedlar's. Mr. Groom wants to see them again before he starts operating. I couldn't make the X-ray people understand what was wanted, so I had to go down myself about it. I've got them all here." She stood politely back while Sophia started to go up the stairs. Neither of them paid the least attention to Dick. He thought, in a sudden confused inarticulate rage, "These women . . ." Miss Dean had turned her back on him; Dolly stood still within a yard of him, handsome and high-coloured, in her clean blue-and-white striped uniform and her starched Monday morning apron, with the big orange X-ray envelope under her arm. She looked at Dick as if she had never seen him before. He could not help himself, he uttered her name on a note of exasperated appeal. "Dolly . . ." said he, under his breath, scarcely moving his lips for fear Miss Dean should hear him.

Dolly Clark gave him a look which showed him plainly, too late, that she knew all he had to tell her. "Congratulations, Mr. Groom," said Dolly out loud, in a voice which quivered with rage. "This is a great day for you, isn't it?" And she whisked past him with a crackle of her starched skirts and ran up the stairs after Miss Dean. Dick was left to walk sulkily down the corridor by himself, out across the damp and foggy courtyard to the out-patient hall. He was in a furious temper, everything had gone wrong so far with his day. "Good-morning, Sister," said he, trying to sound more affable than he felt. "I'm a few minutes late, I'm

afraid. Hope you haven't got too much work for me," but Sister Gater merely put on her martyred air, glanced pointedly at the clock and replied, "There are a good many patients waiting already." She could not abide Dick Groom.

In all departments of Yeoman's Hospital, by this time, the morning's work was getting well under way. Down in the laundry they had already sorted out the morning's wash and got the boilers going; in the kitchen the Home Sister had ordered the week's meals and gone out to the storeroom. The cooks were chopping up the last few joints of a pile of rabbits, the vegetable maids had scrubbed and cut up a mountain of carrots for stew. In the scullery the breakfast crockery was coming out, dry and shining, from the washing machine, and the kitchen staff were beginning to think about elevenses. In out-patients the cases were moving up the benches; in the surgical wards they were getting on with the dressings. Over in the maternity ward they were filling the bottles and dumping the babies down beside their mothers. A case had just gone into the labour ward; another child, born half an hour earlier, was being washed and dressed. "There doesn't seem to be much decline in the birth-rate in this part of the world," said the nurse on the job, dropping silver nitrate into the child's eyes; and the staff-nurse, who had been up all night, replied gloomily, "You might as well keep rabbits and be done with it."

Meanwhile up in the main theatre, on the second floor, they had a clear morning and were getting comfortably ahead with the preparations for Mr. Groom's operating afternoon. Mason, the instrument-man, in patched gum-boots and an old mackintosh apron, passed down to him from the surgeons, had aired the big room early, shut the windows and turned on the heating. He had hosed down the tiled walls and left the water standing in pools on the mosaic floor; he had cleaned up the two big sterilisers and set them alight. Now he was sharpening knives and whistling through his teeth, a cheerful tune, since of all his many jobs this was the one he liked best. Nobody could teach him anything about putting an edge on a cutting tool. He tried a scalpel against his thumb and nodded approval. "Cuttin' paper that is," he boasted. "See the *Express* smorning, nurse? I saw where it says that this Hitler's goin' to commit suicide." He spoke as if the date had been already arranged.

"And a good thing too, if you was to ask me." Nurse Webber, the plump little theatre nurse, sighed, "Oh! Hitler; there isn't time to think about him up here, thank goodness!" and went on counting instruments.

"Put out another dozen Spencer Wells, nurse," said Sister Harbinger, the big jolly ginger-haired theatre sister popping her head round the door of the scrubbing-up room. "It doesn't do to be short; and do be careful about the gloves. Eights for Mr. Groom and sixes for Miss Dean and me. Mr. Groom's so careless with his gloves and it seems to me you can't get any decent rubber in war-time. Have you got plenty of cyclopropane up, Mason? That Dr. Whatshisname is giving the anæsthetics and he won't use anything else." Like most people in Yeoman's Hospital she had abandoned the struggle to pronounce the name of the little cat-faced Czech refugee, who at present held the post of Resident Surgical Officer and gave anæsthetics when the regular anæsthetist from outside was not available.

"Got a long list to-day, Sister?" inquired Mason affably. He was a privileged person in the theatre and well aware of it; an old R.A.M.C. orderly who knew his job inside out and could have replaced Sister at a pinch at the instrument tray. "Only three so far," replied Sister Harbinger. "A laparotomy, a hernia and an appendix, all from Lister." "Ah! laparotomy," said Mason, wagging his head and rubbing briskly away. "That's what they calls it when they don't know what they'll find and won't say what they're looking for." "Will that be enough gowns and towels, Sister?" inquired Nurse Webber, and Sister, counting on her fingers, replied, "That ought to be plenty. Ring down to the laundry and ask them why they haven't sent up our basket. Tell them that's two mornings they've been late with it and there's no excuse; and don't forget Mr. Groom's tomato juice, will you?"

3

Up in Linacre, the women's medical ward, Dr. Shoesmith was getting on with his morning round. The Senior Physician at Yeoman's Hospital had the word grandfather written all over him. He was like nothing so much as Father Christmas, with his ruddy open-air complexion, his curly white hair and beard, his big warm hands and burly presence. Though he stooped a little nowadays, he was still not far short of six foot tall and stout in proportion. In his day he had been a great rider to hounds and though now he moved more

slowly than he used to do he remained uncommonly vigorous and lively for his age. He had a deep booming voice and his old eyes were still black and piercing behind his big glasses. He was capable of an uncommonly shrewd and critical glance when he was annoyed, which was fairly often, for in spite of his kind heart he was a peppery and prejudiced old gentleman. He enjoyed his glass and his dinner, and displayed a warm gossiping curiosity about the doings of his fellow-men; but he also had a good many antiquarian interests, collected old herbals and prescription books, liked to lecture his juniors on the history of medicine, was a considerable authority on the lives and practice of the older physicians and found time to write and read various papers on that subject before certain learned societies of which he was a member. He was an authority on the topography and history of Wilchester and the country round it and was supposed to have collected material for a history of Yeoman's Hospital, which he intended to write when he retired, though he said cheerfully that nobody but himself would find it interesting. Old Tom, in short was a character and an institution; you could not imagine the place without him.

His house physician, little Arthur Cook, fresh from the London training hospital, where he had taken his degree six months earlier, put Dr. Shoesmith down as a fussy, pottering out-of-date old nuisance, who should have been retired ten years earlier. There the big man sat, for a good ten minutes, on the edge of Mrs. Glover's bed, happily going over her chest, while the sister and her attendant nurses waited patiently upon him. The staff nurse surreptitiously stood on the outside edge of her shoes as an exercise against flat foot, to which she was a little prone, and Arthur Cook swallowed a yawn. Every doctor has his favourite malady and with old Daddy Shoesmith it was unfortunately heart disease, of which his knowledge was extensive and peculiar.

He loved to potter over a heart case and it was no use trying to hurry him past one. First he tapped delicately across and down, marking out the shape of the distended organ with his blue pencil on the woman's pale skin; and then he listened long and thoughtfully at the four doors of the heart, attentive to the rasping and blowing murmurs made by the blood as it tugged and twisted at the rough chalky ragged valves, that should have been silk-soft and gently waving, like weeds in a flowing stream. "Aha" said old Tom and "Oho," and "Humph," in a series of modulated grunts, of which he was quite unconscious. Then he shifted his

stethoscope to the dilated veins throbbing in the corded neck. The woman lay staring at him with her anxious eyes, while he considered the wild disordered scurry of her heart, a racing ungoverned engine shaking itself to pieces.

Little Arthur Cook had listened to that heart himself on the previous night and fingered the thin irregular pulse that ran like an overstretched thread across the hollow between the two bones of the wrist. There were no two beats alike in that tremulous vessel. "Auricular fibrillation," said Arthur Cook and left it at that, jotting down a few of the regular remedies on Mrs. Glover's chart. There was really hardly anything to be done for such cases and not much to be learnt from them. They rested and got a little better, they went out again and got a little worse; presently you heard that they were dead. Arthur Cook liked something less definite, on which he could experiment. He was newly qualified and thought that he had the whole body of medicine and surgery at his fingers' ends. Indeed he could rattle off a great many prescriptions, still knew his text-books by heart and seldom had any doubts about his own diagnosis. He had just the sort of glib ignorance which Dr. Shoesmith found most irritating. The old man liked a little more humility and deliberation, and thought that his house-physician still had almost everything to learn. He had once rapped out in the staff room, "My new boy is the complete embodiment of Voltaire's epigram, *A physician is a person who pours drugs of which he knows little into a body of which he knows less.*"

When Arthur Cook was going round with his chief his face shone with conscious good behaviour. His neat hands and feet, smooth fair hair parted down the middle, cherubic features and light high precise voice, all irritated Dr. Shoesmith past bearing. The boy considered his patients as so many faulty machines, to be set going again as quickly as possible, or thrown on the scrap-heap; he seemed to lack any personal curiosity about them. "Cook is the right sort of man," said old Tom in his prejudiced way, "to take a job at one of these government health centres when they materialise. He won't feel any regrets about knocking off at five and turning his patient over to the next man on duty. He's got no initiative and no curiosity and he enjoys filling in forms. He hasn't even got any ambition, all he wants in this life is a steady income and no competition. I can't stand the fellow. However, as soon as his six months here are up they'll take him for the Services and I shan't be plagued with him any longer."

Blissfully unconscious of his chief's opinion, little Cook stood unruffled in his clean white coat, playing with his stethoscope and looking as if butter would not melt in his prim mouth. Old Tom turned back the bedclothes and dented his thumb gently into the puffed flesh behind and above Mrs. Glover's ankle, leaving a soft sodden dimple wherever he touched it. Then he must needs put in another few minutes attending to the moist murmurs in the back and front of Mrs. Glover's lungs and looking through the sheaf of her old notes, a ragged bundle interrupted here and there by long folded electrocardio-graphic tracings, like a dance of lightning, or the trimming of a gown. "Yes," he murmured happily, "there's a nice classical case for you, Cook. It's all here in the records. An old rheumatic endocarditis ; mitral stenosis . . . hypertrophy of the right side going on to dilation . . . incompetence of the mitral valve . . . cardiac failure leading on to back-pressure . . . two or three little bouts of auricular flutter and now auricular fibrillation. I've been expecting this ; a child couldn't miss it. You'd better go over this case carefully ; you'll never see a better." And he turned back to the patient, asking her, "How are you feeling this morning ?"

The woman sighed and laid her thin hand on her breast. "I feel it here," she complained. "For all the world like a bird trying to get out." "Ah ! We won't let it do that just yet, my dear," said old Tom, patting her hand. "What you want is more foxglove tea to keep it quiet." She nodded and smiled, a patient smile, brilliant with the porcelain white of a new set of false teeth. "My Granny always did say foxglove tea was good for the heart," she agreed, in a satisfied voice. Old Tom asked her whether those new teeth of hers were getting any more comfortable, while Cook yawned openly. He was tired of hearing Dr. Shoesmith call tincture of digitalis foxglove tea to his old women and no longer thought it at all funny ; but he had to spring to attention immediately when the senior physician, who seemed to have eyes in the back of his head, wanted to know, "What are you doing for this case, doctor ?"

Arthur Cook rattled off a string of prescriptions, but got little encouragement. Dr. Shoesmith hated a multitude of remedies and crossed a couple of them off the case-sheet, quoting, as he did so, something irreverent about sinking the whole *materia medica* to the bottom of the sea : "So much the better for mankind and the worse for the fishes. All you need on top of your foxglove tea is something to make you

sleep, isn't it?" said he to the patient cheerfully; but after he had left her and was washing his hands in the middle of the ward he said to his house physician with a sharp sigh, "You know, Cook, we're too late for that woman, by about a quarter of a century."

Arthur Cook put up his almost invisible blond eyebrows while the old man trotted out Mrs. Glover's history. It was an amiable weakness of his to display his encyclopædic knowledge of his old patients. "She didn't choose her parents well. Her father was a great big beefy drayman from Ferriman's brewery, who died of an aortic aneurysm. He got that from rolling heavy casks about and drinking what came out of them. Her mother was one of those delicate red-haired women who keep on getting sore throats and pains in their joints. This Mrs. Glover was just the same when she was a girl, she tells me, always getting sore throats and growing pains. She had bad teeth too and there were no school clinics in those days, so she lost all her teeth before she was thirty, but she kept those bad tonsils of hers instead. She worked in the laundry when she was young and was always getting chills from coming out of the steam into the cold; and one winter she had rheumatic fever. I suppose that was when her heart first got touched. She shouldn't have married as young as she did; but she was very pretty then, if you admire that red-haired white-skinned small-boned type, so marry she did and had six children, with very little time off between them. Her husband's at Brewster's paper mill, so they live in Shaker's Row, to be near his work. You don't know where that is? No, I suppose not," as the house physician shook his head differently. "Ah! but you should know," grunted old Tom crossly. "One of the very first things to find out about a rheumatic case is what sort of house your patient lives in. Shaker's Row is the place the artists all go to sketch in the summer between the milldam and the canal, uncommonly picturesque timber-framed cottages with a boarded walk in front. The children sail boats out of the windows on the canal in front and the privies hang over the river behind; and the water comes into the cellars in November and doesn't go out again till March. I've been trying to get Shaker's Row condemned for years but so far I haven't succeeded. Philip Brewster owns them and of course he's got the town council in his pocket."

Sister Priest was head of Sydenham, the men's medical ward, where Dr. Shoesmith finished his round. She was Mr. Brewster's second cousin and there were plenty of people about the hospital who were ready to tell you that she would never have kept her job if she had been any one else. She passed on all the ward gossip, they said, to her cousins when she went there to supper on her off-duty Sundays. She was one of the senior sisters and had been in Sydenham ward for nine years. She was an inefficient woman who often reminded Dr. Shoesmith of a hen. She had the same scuttling pouncing movements when she was in a hurry and when she was perplexed the same fussy, fidgety, way of shaking herself, cocking her head on one side and clucking disgustedly over what had gone wrong. She did it now when Dr. Shoesmith turned on her to ask her suddenly and testily what had become of Number Seven's blood count. "That leukæmia, Sister, I signed the requisition form for it last time I came round."

Sister Priest became flurried immediately, as she always did when the Senior Physician puckered his eyebrows. She rummaged among papers, sent a nurse for Number Seven's case-sheets and generally turned the ward upside down, but she did not succeed in producing any blood-count. Nurse Gow, the staff-nurse, an upright disdainful young Scotswoman, declared that the paper had never been returned from the pathological department. "Dr. Marriner came down on Thursday and took a sample," said she firmly in her Highland accent. "I mind that well. You were off-duty that day, Sister." Dr. Shoesmith felt sure she was right; he considered that she was the only woman in that ward with a head on her shoulders. Somewhat put about, he ordered, "Ring through to the department," and this was done, but after some delay a flurried probationer came back to confess that she could not get any answer. "There doesn't seem to be anybody up there, sir; Dr. Marriner must be down in one of the wards." Daddy Shoesmith said, "Very well; I'll have a word with him myself about it later in the day." Dr. Marriner, the somewhat overworked hospital pathologist, was his own nephew and he preferred to make his own inquiries. He was not satisfied with the way the boy had been doing his work lately and thought it was about time to tell him so.

"There's another thing, sir, before you go," Sister Priest complained. "Number Fifteen says he doesn't want to be operated on after all." Dr. Shoesmith said, "The devil he

doesn't " and turning back he approached the bed, where a sulky ginger-headed man, with the drawn sour face of the chronic dyspeptic, sat enthroned among his pillows. "What's this, man?" old Tom asked him. "I thought we'd arranged about your operation last time I came round." "I bin thinking it over and I've made up me mind different. I don't want to be cut open and messed about," said Number Fifteen, with a stubborn air. Arthur Cook pursed up his little round mouth and looked down his nose. "Did they come over to look at him from the surgical side?" old Tom inquired and Arthur Cook nodded. "Miss Dean went over him and said Mr. Groom would have a bed for him on Tuesday." "Ah! there was a young woman come and asked a whole string of questions," grumbled Number Fifteen. "A handsome young piece she was too and knew her own mind, but I'm not letting any young women start carving me about. If I was to go over into that other ward like as not they'd take out arf me stummick. That young woman said so." Sister Priest hushed him anxiously, "You mustn't talk like that, you really mustn't," and old Tom's black eyes twinkled behind his glasses. "Don't you want to get well?" he inquired in his great hearty voice, turning over the sheets of the case-papers, but hardly troubling to read them. He knew well enough by this time what was in them. "I bin in 'ere long enough," said Number Fifteen, "drinkin' that there white chalk mixture an' lettin' you folks take photygrafts of me inside an' me teeth an' all. I don't want no operation. I wants to go back where I belong, see." And he concluded crossly, "After all it's my stummick, aint it?"

"Certainly it's your stomach," said old Tom and he gave the case-papers back to Arthur Cook and put his hands in his pockets. "You can keep it as far I'm concerned." Everybody stared at him, the house physician with disgust, Sister Priest with her worried look and the patient with a mingling of doubt and disappointment. He said calmly, "You've given us trouble enough in here; be off with you and have a try at curing yourself. Have those bad teeth out; don't smoke so much plug and don't drink so many pints, cut out vinegar and pickles and gin and you'll outlive me yet." "Very likely I will," said Number Fifteen stoutly. "There's more old drunks than old doctors anyhow." Sister Priest clucked with horror, but Dr. Shoesmith retorted, in his booming voice, "Doctors are like beer, best when they're old," and they both laughed, more loudly than Sister Priest

approved. "These people don't know what's good for them," complained Arthur Cook as they went down the ward. "The man's taken up that bed for a week, having a barium meal and a blood count and an X-ray to look for gallstones. Now he insists on going out again without having anything done about himself. It's a waste of everybody's time." He was genuinely indignant, for he had a tidy mind and nothing vexed him more than unfinished ends. "Now we shan't ever find out what was the matter with him," he grumbled; but Dr. Shoesmith, disappointingly, remained indifferent. "Oh, he'll come back again, very likely, one of these days. They're not just raw material for us to practice on," he pointed out. "They've got their own lives to get through. Anyhow I don't know that he'd have been a very good subject for an operation." Arthur Cook shrugged his shoulders. "Cure the disease, kill the patient," said Dr. Shoesmith darkly. "It's a good motto when you're young, I dare say, but you'll grow out of it. We all do." Arthur Cook thought him a tiresome old fellow and wished him in hell, but dared not say so.

Dr. Shoesmith came last to the man in the corner bed, behind the red screens. This case had been admitted during the night, an unknown tramp who had been thrown out of the Mason's Arms in the Beastmarket and had then had some sort of a fit on the pavement. The police had brought him in about midnight. Nobody knew who he was. He had been dressed in a seaman's blue trousers and jersey, a peaked cap and old broken boots and there had been nothing at all in his pockets; no money, no ration-book, no identity card. Somebody had been over him and robbed him clean before the police found him in the gutter beside St. Blazey's Church. He lay now propped up on pillows with his eyes half-shut and his mouth open, a little wizened transparent old man with his calloused hands open before him on the blanket. The stubble of his beard and hair was like silvery grey plush and there was a fixed patch of red on either cheekbone, like the flush on a withered apple. He breathed in harsh rapid gasps and every so often he coughed a short painful cough; it made his face twitch queerly. Old Tom stood looking from him to the zigzags on the chart in his hand and shrugged his heavy shoulders; at such times he had begun to wonder what this lonely business of dying would feel like when he arrived at it himself. "Yes," said he aloud, "pneumonia, the old man's friend; we shall all come to that if we live long enough," but Arthur Cook was not listening.

Sister Priest had fussily begun to unpack layers of flannel and cotton wool from the labouring ribs. She signed to one of her nurses to move away the oxygen cylinder and give Dr. Shoesmith room. He would have said, "Let the man be," but it was too late for that; so he went through the ritual of examination, tapping and auscultating methodically about the scattered patches of dull inflammation, attending soberly to the feeble and irregular rhythm of the failing heart. He did not discover anything that he had not known before. "Yes . . ." said he and "I dare say . . ." and "Very likely . . ." to the details which his house physician offered him about the case. "Is he taking his food?" he inquired. Sister Priest shook her head. "He can't seem to keep anything down, sir; he's very thirsty and this morning he had a hiccupping fit." "Yes; kidneys giving out, of course," nodded Dr. Shoesmith. Sister Priest fretted, "He oughtn't to be here. The police had no business to bring him in, he should have gone to the infirmary, but I suppose he can't be moved now." She always hated a death in the ward, as Dr. Shoesmith knew. "It takes up a bed," was her complaint. Dr. Shoesmith said merely, "We'll have to leave him where he is, I'm afraid." The unknown patient roused up a little and muttered to himself, but nobody caught what he said. His face twitched and crumpled up fretfully and he rolled his head on the pillow. "Well," said Dr. Shoesmith in conclusion, "he won't trouble you long. A sailor, did you say? I'm afraid he's done his last voyage." And he washed his hands at the centre table for the last time, nodded good-morning to Sister and her nurses and bustled out of the ward, with Arthur Cook trotting at his heels like a well-trained puppy. Old Daddy Shoesmith was due to attend a monthly meeting of the hospital board of management at eleven-fifteen.

CHAPTER FOUR

I

THE BOARD-ROOM at Yeoman's Hospital was in the old central block, just beside the main entrance. It was an admirably proportioned room, panelled in Georgian mahogany and had a good marble mantelpiece, carved with garlands and rams' skulls. Above this mantelpiece hung the portrait of Captain Ephraim Yeoman, master mariner and

the founder of the hospital, a wooden-faced old sea dog in a blue coat with brass buttons, who carried a telescope under one arm and squinted villainously from beneath a black patch, worn over the right eye, Nelson-fashion. His background was a tropic sea, carefully scalloped with neat ripples, on which a full-rigged ship rode at anchor. The artist had decorated the horizon for full measure, behind the captain's head, with an island, a couple of mop-headed palm-trees and a lighthouse. This picture was one of the treasures of the hospital.

The mahogany chairs and table in the board-room had traditionally furnished the captain's cabin during his years at sea. The chairman's round silver inkstand had the initials E.Y. entwined upon it, as had the squat silver candlesticks which flanked it on formal occasions. The captain's sea chest stood beneath the window, a solid mahogany chest of drawers with brass corners and sunken brass handles. The hospital deeds and papers were supposed to be kept in it, but actually had been long deposited with Ferriman's Bank in the High Street ; however, it gave the room an air. One or two prints of no particular value were framed upon the walls, giving views of the hospital at different dates. The oldest was a perspective of the women's ward, showing it furnished with curtained four-posters and staffed by a single mob-capped nurse armed with a warming-pan. The elevation of the Jubilee wing and a plan of the hospital drainage system completed the inventory.

Dr. Shoesmith had devoted the first chapter of his history of the hospital to the memorials of Captain Ephraim Yeoman. He was fascinated by the character of this sturdy rogue, who had in fact amassed his considerable fortune in the slave trade, plying between the port of Bristol, the coast of Dahomey and the island of Cuba in his ship the *Pearl of Whydah*. He had continued in this business very successfully for many years to the satisfaction of his owners and had always had the name of a very skilful trader ; but upon the abolition of the slave-trade in the British dominions, in the year 1807, he had retired in disgust and returned to settle in his native town of Wilchester, from which he had run away to sea in disgrace at the age of sixteen. Captain Yeoman had always been a shrewd man of business and he had amassed a considerable fortune in private ventures, besides what he could steal from his owners. He bought himself a comfortable house in the Beastmarket, laid down a good cellar, took a pew in St. Blazey's Church and presently married Lavinia, daughter of Mr. James Butler, a very

respectable apothecary of that town, who had attended him in some of his bouts of West India fever. The captain had returned from some forty years at sea a little wizened fellow, as golden as a guinea. His face was pitted with smallpox and his blood, he complained, had been turned to bile and water by dysentery, Yellow Jack and breakbone fever, besides innumerable attacks of the malignant tertian ague, which still returned upon him whenever the damp winters of his native town chilled his liver. He was many years older than his lady when he married her and from his withered looks might have been taken for her father; but though he complained that his voyages and sicknesses had left him more like a mouse than a man, he nevertheless survived both his young wife and his two children by her, who were both sickly brats and died in infancy.

He lived to a ripe old age, but vowed that he had not the heart to marry again. When he died of an apoplexy, got from his rejoicings and health-drinkings at the accession of His Gracious Majesty, King George the Fourth, he left no legitimate children in Wilchester, though it was rumoured that he had sired plenty of another colour, both in Africa and in the West Indies. It was found that he had left the remainder of his fortune, upon the persuasion of his late father-in-law, Mr. Butler, for the foundation of a house, to be called Yeoman's Hospital. The captain provided in his will that seafaring men who were suffering from disease or accident should be admitted at all times without any recommendation and he attempted to exclude all members of the Society of Friends from its benefits; for as he rightly complained, it was the Quakers and other psalm-singing abolitionists who had first stirred up the mud about slavery and been the ruin of the West India trade.

Dr. Shoesmith always delighted in pointing out this clause to John Ferriman, at present treasurer of the hospital and head of the Quaker brewing and banking family of Ferriman, who had all been great benefactors of the hospital. Finally Captain Yeoman bequeathed, as a site for his foundation, all that piece or parcel of ground, commonly called Jerusalem Field, in the parish of St. Blazey's at the corner of the Beast-market and Abbot's Lane, containing five and a quarter acres, on which stood the ruins of the Priory of St. John of Jerusalem, destroyed at the Reformation.

There had been some delay in carrying the provisions of the captain's will into effect. His relatives, with all of whom he had long quarrelled, nevertheless tried to upset the will,

swearing that he had seldom been sober in his later days and had been in no condition to understand what he was signing ; and a woman came forward who claimed that he had married her secretly, years before, in the port of Bristol and made his home with her there between voyages and had children by her. However in the end it was proved that he had deceived her by a mock-ceremony and the will was adjudged to stand. The foundation stone of the hospital was finally laid with great ceremony by the fifth Duke of Wilchester, first patron of the hospital, in the year 1825, on the first day of October. That date had been the Captain's birthday, as was set forth by his epitaph in St. Blazey's, where he had a handsome monument, a female figure lamenting upon an urn, draped in flags and surmounted by a trophy of sextants, telescopes and other marine instruments. Captain Yeoman left directions for a memorial service to be held yearly upon this anniversary, and a sermon to be preached by the rector from the text Ecclesiasticus, chapter 38, verse one "*Honour a physician with the honour that is due him.*" This service was still maintained, though nowadays it was usually held on the Sunday nearest to the Captain's birthday and kept as the Harvest Festival and Hospital Sunday. The Mayor and the Town Council attended in their robes, with the mace carried before them in procession and the fire brigade in attendance. After the Yeoman birthday sermon a collection was taken for the hospital and the fruit and flowers were given round the wards next day.

Part of the shapely Regency building put up by the Captain's legacy, remained as the central block of the hospital. It consisted of a handsome stone portico, an entrance hall flagged with black-and-white stones and a fine oak staircase, adorned with a bust of Captain Yeoman in marble. Naturally this entrance was only used by the honorary staff and by important visitors ; the patients were admitted at the casualty and out-patient doors, round the corner of the yard in Abbot's Lane. The staircase led to the two original wards, one for males and the other for females ; they were too small and too poorly ventilated for nursing nowadays so one was used as the X-ray department and the other as the Matron's office.

On either side of this block the hospital had grown like a hermit crab ; adding to itself in the course of two centuries, by the benefactions of the Ferrimans, the Brewsters and other worthies of the town, besides its surgical and medical wards,

the out-patient department, the children's and maternity wards and in the Jubilee Wing, besides the kitchen, the laundry and the Ferriman Nurses' Home. All these buildings had been put up at different dates, out of the ugly dark red local brick from Claypits. They were connected together by covered ways, iron bridges and balconies in an accidental and haphazard fashion and surrounded by an expanse of asphalt and gravel.

2

The Ferriman Nurses' Home, said Dr. Shoesmith, owed its existence to a thwarted love-affair. The portrait of Miss Alethea Ferriman, which hung over the fireplace in the nurses' sitting-room, showed a little lady in black, with a Limerick lace collar fastened by a cameo brooch. She had grey hair smoothed into a chignon too heavy for the slender neck that carried it, folded hands with plaited hair bracelets at the wrists and a pair of enormous mournful dark eyes, which seemed to follow you about the room. "Looks a bit like Christina Rossetti, doesn't she?" Dr. Shoesmith would observe. "It's an odd face; she must have been a fanatic, perhaps a hysteric, with a dash of religious mania and an itch for power. She wanted to go out to the Crimea with Florence Nightingale, but her parents wouldn't allow it. There are family letters about it, John Ferriman showed them to me, but he doesn't think they ought to be published. She wasn't merely a single-minded spinster, rising thirty, with a passion for doing good; far from it. There had been a young man all right, who wanted to marry her when she was quite a girl, a dashing cavalry officer. The old Ferrimans wouldn't hear of it, because he was a soldier, so he went off with his regiment and got himself killed at the Alma. I fancy he was the real reason why Miss Alethea wanted to get out to Scutari. It wasn't all Miss Nightingale and her terrible great work among the sick and wounded. However, after her old lover was dead Miss Alethea settled down again for a time to be the dutiful daughter of the period, but she still had this bee in her poke-bonnet about nursing. She never married, though I dare say it wasn't for want of suitors. There was plenty of money; the Ferrimans all have that peculiar Quaker faculty for making money out of perfectly straight dealing, while other people usually seem obliged to cheat to get really rich. Banking and brewing had always been their line, as it is to this day. Miss Alethea had an

uncommonly good head for business. She kept her finger in all the family pies and she was a very wealthy woman. The hospital was her passion ; she rescued it when it had fallen on very bad days and she put the nursing on a proper basis. Before her time the nurses were a poor, untrained lot, not much better than scrubbing women. There's plenty in the records about how they got drunk and carried on with the patients. They were called the Family," said Dr. Shoesmith, with his broad smile, " and Miss Alethea swept them away. She brought down the first matron and nursing sisters from Miss Nightingale's new training school at Saint Thomas's and later on, when she built the Ferriman Nurses' Home, Miss Nightingale herself came down to inspect it. You'd think, to hear some of the probationers talk, that nothing had been done to the place since," he would interject, " but the Ferriman family and particularly the Ferriman women, have always taken a great interest in the place. According to their lights they've done the best they could for it."

"Of course Miss Alethea was a very peculiar woman in many ways and she left her mark on Yeoman's. For thirty years, she was the queen of this place. She used to drive down every week and make a tour of inspection. She put her nose into every corner, the kitchen, the linen room and the laundry, she spoke to all the patients and looked all the nurses over. It was like a royal visit. Afterwards she used to drink tea with the Matron and tell her what was wrong with Yeoman's. There wasn't much going on inside these four walls that Miss Alethea didn't know ; and she was particularly strict with the nurses. She designed that perfectly frightful uniform they used to wear," said old Tom, screwing up his rosy face, " enormous sleeves, skirts touching the ground, stiff cuffs and collars and little caps perched up on top and of course those short Nightingale capes to hide the female figure. She used to lecture the nurses once a year on the ethics of their profession and tell them they must strive to be worthy of such a noble calling. People talked about nursing like that in her day. In Miss Alethea's eyes it was practically a religious vocation. I remember seeing her carriage in the courtyard time and again, when I was a boy. Red wheels it had and silver-plated harness and the coachman and footman wore green liveries. She always drove bays and liked them matched to a hair. She used to speak to me if she saw me waiting outside in my father's dog-cart. My father was physician to the hospital then, as his father had been before him," boasted old Tom, whose

modest pride it was that he represented the third generation of Shoemsmiths to practise in Wilchester.

"The old woman tipped me a whole sovereign once, because my father told her I was going back to school next day. That must have been at the end of the eighties because she'd come down to see how the builders were getting on with the Jubilee Wing and she'd laid the foundation stone of that some months earlier. A terrifying little woman she was, I remember, with a thin high voice like a violin and that swaying gliding walk; the women all had it then, but you don't see it any more nowadays. She used to come down the corridor as if she were floating along the ground. She died not so very long afterwards, rather unexpectedly, for she wasn't much more than sixty-five," said old Tom, setting back his stalwart shoulders. "She left the bulk of her fortune to Yeoman's; that was how the maternity ward came to be added to the Jubilee wing. There was some talk at the time of changing the name of the foundation from Yeoman's Hospital to Ferriman's Hospital, but they found she'd left instructions against it, so the old name was kept. That's how Yeoman's Hospital came into being," Dr. Shoemsmith would say, driving his hands deep into his pockets. "It was built by an old slave-trader who didn't know what to do with his ill-gotten fortune and an old Quakeress who wanted an outlet for her energies and affections. The place had its roots in charity, or in human kindness, if you prefer that way of putting it, and if that sentiment got a bit mixed up with vanity and love of power, still it was true kindness all the same. Nowadays it's the fashion to sneer at charity; people tell me we've grown out of all that. Charity is to be replaced by some sort of State organisation; there isn't to be any more gratitude, or patronage, or pity and this insanitary crowded ugly building is to be done away with. One of these days, I suppose, they'll pull down Captain Yeoman's building and put up something functional in concrete in its place. All I say is, I hope I don't live to see it," Dr. Shoemsmith would conclude, for he was an old man who loved the past and hated any change.

3

In the board-room of the hospital, under the portrait of Captain Yeoman, the board of management met once a month, at eleven-fifteen in the morning, to receive reports from the Matron and from the finance, nursing and house

committees, and to discuss staff appointments and matters of hospital policy. It was usually a routine affair, since most of the work had already been done in committee, but from time to time it was enlivened by an outburst from Philip Brewster, who always wanted his own way, by a skirmish between the lay and medical members, or by a flare-up in the chronic warfare between Miss Barber, the Matron, and Councillor Miss Farmer, her particular enemy.

Captain Chandler, the secretary-superintendent, regarded the monthly board meeting as little better than an interruption to the smooth running of his exquisite intricate hospital machine. He was a thin, sandy-haired, fidgety man in his early fifties, who had been a regular soldier until the loss of an arm, in the battle of the Somme, had put an end to his soldiering. He suffered a good deal from neuritis in his stump; and this, with a trick of continually raising his foxy eyebrows, had etched five permanent horizontal lines across his forehead, so that even when he was most at ease he looked harassed and worried. He was a bachelor and lived in a small house at the back of the hospital courtyard and he had not a thought in his head that did not concern Yeoman's.

The hospital was the only thing he cared about. He managed it with admirable precision and discipline, enduring the suggestions and criticisms of the board of management with what patience he could muster, though at the bottom of his heart he often wished its members a hundred miles away. If he had ever confessed, even to himself, what was his true opinion it would have been that he could have got on perfectly well without them. All he needed was a report from the Matron, an occasional evening over the accounts with the treasurer and a little advice from time to time from the medical staff; otherwise he had reduced the affairs of Yeoman's to a system. He admitted, however, that you had to let the subscribers have their say; it was part of what they paid for, it was the English system. So on this Monday, as on every fourth Monday throughout the year, Captain Chandler stood underneath the Yeoman portrait, watching his female clerk put round the agenda papers, the pencils and blotting-paper, and hoped that nobody would be late.

On this particular Monday they were all fairly punctual. The Matron, of course was always on time, tall and severe, in her blue alpaca and her muslin cap, with her books under her arm, displaying that peculiar coy deference which she reserved for the occasion. Next stumped in Mr. John

Ferriman, the present head of the family, short and stout, with yellow streaks in his longish silky white hair. He was quarrelsome, for a Quaker, but an admirable man of business. He had not far to come, since Ferriman's Bank was only just round the corner. He brought with him the chairman of the board, Frank Sawyer the chemist from the High Street, at present Mayor of Wilchester, a man of strong Socialist theories, precise, methodical and slow as became a member of his profession. He had been on the board longer than any one else except Dr. Shoesmith. He and Mr. Ferriman between them had been the inventors of the admirable provident scheme, which brought in a solid contribution weekly towards the hospital expenses; and he had done Yeoman's another good turn at the outbreak of war by insisting on buying the usual drugs and dressings for three years ahead, before prices ran up and all foreign drugs became scarce. Frank Sawyer was a meek and sensible little man, and the only trouble about having him as chairman was that he was no match for Philip Brewster, the owner of the paper mill on Dyer's Wharf. Brewster was inclined to throw his weight about on business matters, and as his subscriptions were handsome, and a great number of his workmen were patients of the hospital, he considered that he had a right to his own opinion on the board. He came in later than the others, for Brewster's Mill was a good ten minutes' walk from the hospital and it took just as long to drive, because from that watery quarter of the town you had to go round by the canal-lock and the Abbot's Bridge.

Last of all, while the minutes were being read, in fluttered Councillor Miss Farmer, gushing apologies. She was a new broom on the board, a little thin, fidgety, sentimental spinster, who had worked hard for the hospital for years in other ways. She had been a regular visitor and was always ready with her subscriptions, particularly where the women's and children's wards were concerned; she ran the hospital library and was hand and glove with the lady almoner. The only pity was that she and the Matron could never agree. Dr. Shoesmith, coming down just behind her from his round in Sydenham, completed the attendance; Mr. Dyer, the ear, nose and throat surgeon, who had a seat on the board, was on holiday and the Rector of St. Blazey's was unable to attend that morning. Captain Chandler heaved a sigh and hoped that the occasion would pass off quietly.

They began with the usual formal business, the minutes of the last meeting, the visitors' reports and the almoner's

regular complaint that she had too many patients to see and not enough time to do it in; that was common form and did not detain them long. Then came the Matron's report on her nursing and domestic staff, all much as usual; one new probationer, J. Shepherd, admitted to the nursing school; three nurses leaving, one on completion of training, two, who were still in their trial period, because they did not wish to continue nursing. That happened with about one in four during the early months of their training. They couldn't endure the long hours on their feet, the lack of fresh air, the bullying discipline, the monotonous uninteresting work which was all they got to do to start with. Still, it worried Captain Chandler at times, he fancied that lately there had been rather too many of these resignations. The Matron, he knew, was unusually strict with her nurses; he wasn't sure that she wasn't a bit too strict. You couldn't order the girls about nowadays as you used to do, they wouldn't take it. There had been several rather childish rows lately, about smoking in bedrooms, about flower vases, about tidiness in drawers and cupboards and punctuality at meals; it did all smell like a boarding-school, you couldn't get away from it. Captain Chandler drew a railway engine on his agenda paper and looked more worried than ever, while matron went on to the different nursing appointments.

This one was leaving, that one coming; while Sister Harbinger, the Theatre Sister, was most tiresomely determined to leave Yeoman's Hospital, after five years, and would have to be replaced. The honorary surgeons were reported to be very much vexed about it, Mr. Groom in particular complaining that the woman had just nicely learnt his ways. "What does she want to throw up a perfectly good job for?" fretted Philip Brewster. "Obviously because she thinks she can do better for herself somewhere else," snapped Mr. Ferriman. "She's going up to London, to her old hospital, as Sister Tutor," said the Matron. "And that's a waste of a good surgical nurse," declared old Dr. Shoesmith. "Up there she'll do nothing but lecture the young ones." The Matron gave him full her blue stare for a second, but did not open her mouth. "I suppose the job's better paid than ours," said the Mayor. "All this talk of money is so sordid," lamented Councillor Miss Farmer, who had never felt the want of it; "Nowadays people don't think of the nobility of service." The Matron's muslin cap quivered slightly, but she restrained herself and the Mayor answered for her, sighing, "Well, we've all got to live."

Captain Chandler drummed gently on the table with his fingers, wishing the members of his board would keep to the point and Dr. Shoesmith asked, "Have we any one who can replace her among the other sisters? They tell me Sister Abbott is the best surgical nurse we've got, but I dare say she's a bit old and slow for the theatre." "I've mentioned it to her before," said the Matron, "but she won't leave Lister after all these years. She doesn't care about theatre work, really; she only likes the wards." "We have two staff-nurses who are through their final examinations," said Miss Farmer eagerly, "Nurse Clark and Nurse Gow; they both stayed on temporarily for six months, as staff-nurses, because there was no sister's post vacant." She was on the nursing committee, visited the wards constantly and prided herself on knowing the senior nurses by sight and name. She beamed round hopefully, but it appeared that her suggestion was not approved. "Nurse Gow prefers the medical side," said the Matron coldly, and when Miss Farmer persisted, "But Nurse Clark is one of the best surgical nurses we have," merely looked down at her well-kept hands. "Nurse Clark's work in the wards has been perfectly satisfactory," she admitted; "but I should scarcely recommend her for Theatre Sister."

Captain Chandler added a tender and two trucks to the train on his agenda paper. He had, of course, all the gossip of the wards and corridors at the fingertips of his remaining hand; he could have told the innocent Miss Farmer much that was hidden from her about the various reasons why the Matron would never put Nurse Clark forward for any good post that was going. "A smart girl," he thought, "an armful of trouble. Old Groom knows all about the way his boy's been running after her and so does Brewster. You wouldn't catch either of them letting Nurse Clark come up to the theatre, where she'd see young Dick every day. That would be too much of a good thing, just when they've got him safely tied up with Margery Brewster." He stole a sideways look at the mill owner and saw him thrust his bull head forward at the name, looking sulky and suspicious. Philip Brewster knew well enough who Nurse Clark was and how she had been making a fool of young Groom. Sister Priest must have taken that dish of gossip along with her when she went to eat her Sunday supper with her cousins, the Brewsters.

"Can't you find us somebody better for the job than a staff-nurse who's only just finished her training?"

the mill owner grumbled. "Well, sir," said the Matron, "I did think I might send Sister Mercer to the theatre for six weeks, when she comes off night-duty. That would give us time to look round for somebody more experienced than Nurse Clark." And she concluded in her softest accents, "Nurse Clark has very little sense of responsibility. I really do not think she should be appointed theatre sister. She would never satisfy Mr. Groom." Dr. Shoesmith looked at her very hard when she said that; all at once, it became clear to Captain Chandler that he knew what she meant. "There isn't much that old man misses," reflected the secretary superintendent. "He's a wonder. He knows Yeoman's as if it were his own pocket." The Mayor remarked soothingly, "Well, we leave these nursing appointments to you, Matron." Miss Farmer looked bewildered and annoyed, and Philip Brewster, rolling about in his chair, said, "Better advertise the job, I suppose." Captain Chandler made a note on his agenda paper, a hieroglyphic of his own and murmured, "Rushcliffe scale, of course." The hospital had lately been obliged to fall into line over the salaries and working hours of its nurses, but the members of the board still went over the ground again whenever the subject came up.

Captain Chandler, that much-enduring man, glanced mournfully at the clock while Philip Brewster grumbled, "That's the way the money goes; pay 'em more and get less work out of 'em." Miss Farmer proclaimed, "Nurses get little enough as it is. They must be paid properly." "They aren't overpaid, but they're fairly paid," maintained Philip Brewster. "They're earning while they're learning, aren't they? and being fed and clothed? What I say is, it's got to stop somewhere. It isn't only the nurses; there's this new question about the cleaning-women wanting a rise."

He glared at the Matron, who turned a page of her report-book and said, "I have a request here from Home Sister that the charwomen's wages be raised from a shilling an hour to one and threepence." She waited, pencil in hand, raising her eyebrows at an outburst from Miss Farmer. "It's absurd. They've never had more than a shilling an hour ever as long as I can remember. The way wages are being pushed up in Wilchester is simply scandalous. Only this morning my daily woman, who's been with me for over ten years, told me she'd been offered one and sixpence by some newcomer to the district and wanted to know what I was going to do about it." She and Philip Brewster, usually on

opposite sides in any argument, were suddenly found to be at one here, while he grumbled, "My wife has just the same trouble, Miss Farmer. It's nothing but a hold-up, they know we've got to pay whatever they ask." "The trouble is, they can get three times what we can afford in a government factory," sighed Miss Farmer, pushing her hat crooked on her untidy grey hair. "My parlourmaid and my housemaid have both been called up, of course; one's in the A.T.S. and the other's making munitions. Fortunately my cook's over age, but she has to have some help. I do as much as I can myself, but I can't scrub the floors and carry the coals. If my daily woman goes I don't know how I'm to manage." She rubbed her forehead distractedly, while the Matron waited, looking severe. In the pause that followed, after Mr. Sawyer had muttered, "Well, there's a war on" and Mr. Ferriman had retorted, "So it seems," she cleared her throat and announced: "I must have cleaning-women. The probationers can't do everything. It's difficult enough for Home Sister to get the work done as it is. If I can't have sufficient domestic staff we shall have to consider closing some of the wards."

Miss Farmer exclaimed, "Oh! we mustn't do that." Mr. Ferriman remarked to Dr. Shoesmith, under his breath, "probably have to do it anyhow, before the year's out." The Mayor suggested feebly, "Can't the Labour Exchange do anything for us?" but the Matron only shrugged her broad blue alpaca shoulders. "Nobody wants to do domestic work these days," grumbled the mill owner. Captain Chandler looked again at the clock while Matron insisted, "The place has got to be kept clean. I can't afford to lose a single one of my charwomen. I'm afraid I must press for this rise in wages." "There's that other question of Sergeant Forester's extra ten shillings a week," added the treasurer. "We left that to stand over last month; better settle it now while we're about it, hadn't we? He's another who says he can't manage on what he's getting." The gritty subject of finance, as usual, was putting every one in a bad temper. "Will somebody propose a resolution?" asked the Mayor.

When the rise in wages had been duly approved he turned over his agenda paper, sighed, cleared his throat and prepared to change the subject, if only for a few moments, from

the grinding shortage of money. "This appointment of a new Resident Surgical Officer," said he. "Are we to advertise that? The present appointment runs out at the end of next month?" Captain Chandler made the formal gesture of poisoning his pen to write, though there was really nothing much to be settled at this stage. "Just the usual advertisement," he murmured. "Two hundred and fifty, with board and laundry for a year?" "Yes, I suppose so," agreed the Mayor. "Open to men and women?" continued Captain Chandler, looking at Dr. Shoesmith, the only medical member present. "I don't know about that," objected Philip Brewster. "Well," said Dr. Shoesmith, "in war-time you've got to take what you can get. The sort of man you want for this job simply isn't there any more. In peace-time we could pick and choose a bit, get boys who were just qualified for either of the junior posts and somebody with a year or two of experience behind him for R.S.O. Nowadays the boys are only reserved long enough to have one shot at their finals. If they don't get through, they're called up right away. If they do qualify they're given six months or a year for resident appointments, just to cut their teeth a bit; then they get marched off to some camp, or harbour, or aerodrome and turned loose on His Majesty's Forces. A place like Yeoman's has got to make do with young women or foreign refugees." "We don't want any more of those," said Mr. Ferriman hastily. "Look at this chap who's just leaving and the other two poor devils we had before him." Yeoman's Hospital had already entertained several of these harassed elderly men, trying to keep body and soul together in an underpaid post, only meant for a youngster who wanted experience. They were full of knowledge and grievances, scarred in mind and body by hideous calamity; they either talked continually of what they had suffered, or shut up like oysters when you tried to sympathise with them. They became touchy in a subordinate position, after being heads of clinics in Warsaw, or Vienna, or Prague; they were puzzled by national differences in drugs and treatment, they did not get on with the other doctors, and the patients did not like them. "No, indeed," said the Chairman hastily, "we don't want any more foreigners," and Philip Brewster loudly agreed with him.

"Isn't Miss Dean going to apply for the post?" inquired Miss Farmer eagerly. "Surely we need go no further if she did? We should be very fortunate if we could persuade her to stay on." "I don't know so much about that," grumbled

Philip Brewster, who naturally was backing his future son-in-law for the post, as every one knew. "The R.S.O. job is the senior position of the three. We've never had a woman in it before; the other two residents would have to work under her. Miss Dean's a very good girl, I dare say, but is she up to the job?" "Her qualifications are extremely high," said Dr. Shoesmith, "and the honorary surgeons speak very well of her work." He added tartly, "Some people might say the job wasn't good enough for her. After all, we're only a small provincial hospital in rather low water."

This did not go down well. Philip Brewster muttered something sulkily about letting the girl go somewhere else, if she turned up her nose at Yeoman's, and the Mayor let fall the name of young Dick Groom, which was in everybody's mind. Mr. Ferriman inquired tactfully, "Miss Dean gets on all right with the nursing staff; doesn't she, Matron? Women don't always." "Very well indeed," agreed the Matron, and Captain Chandler noted with surprise that her voice was quite warm and agreeable. He had somehow not thought that she cared much for having women doctors about the place; however, she did not apparently mind Miss Dean. It was the Mayor who showed unexpected prejudice, fretting, "I don't know that the older patients like having to see a young girl like Miss Dean. Say what you like, it's bound to be awkward sometimes. I'd rather vote for a man myself, any day." He reddened up and looked worried. "I understand young Mr. Groom is thinking of settling in Wilchester for good." Captain Chandler, turning his face attentively from one to another, thought that he could make a pretty good guess about how the board would divide, when it came to the point, if no fresh candidates appeared in the field. Young Groom's father and his future father-in-law would carry the Mayor with them; Dr. Shoesmith, Mr. Ferriman and Miss Farmer seemed to favour Miss Dean. Of the two absent members, the Rector and his wife were very friendly with the girl and she spent a good deal of her free time at their house; Mr. Dyer, the aural surgeon, was said to approve of her professionally. It certainly looked as if she would get the post, but you never could be sure how an election would go. "Well," said the Mayor, "we'll ask Captain Chandler to advertise the post in the usual papers."

So finally they came round again to the point where all their discussions began and ended, the eternal question of

how Yeoman's Hospital was to pay its way. This time it was the long-resisted proposal to put up the weekly contribution from members of the provident scheme from fivepence to sixpence. On this point the treasurer, Mr. Ferriman, argued long and earnestly and Philip Brewster supported him against the opposition of the Mayor and Miss Farmer. "People won't like it," sighed the lady. "It's a pity, it's a great pity. We had a record collection last year, out in the country districts." "A pity they don't pay up as well in the town itself," said the Mayor, who ran that end of it. "There are far too many people in Wilchester who won't come into the scheme. A thing like this ought to be made compulsory, you know; the State should make every one come into it. Now in Russia..." but Philip Brewster, rolling himself about in his chair, groaned, "Oh! for God's sake don't let's begin to talk about Russia!" Mr. Ferriman hastily interposed with a string of figures. "Everything's gone up all round," he pointed out, "in the ten years since this scheme was started; drugs, dressings, food, coal, staff-wages. Nowadays every patient we admit to the wards costs us getting on for three pound ten a week. Isn't that so, Captain Chandler?"

The Secretary superintendent agreed with him, "That's about the size of it. Everything's gone up except the contributory scheme, although the members are getting far higher wages than ever they did in their lives, and an extra penny a week is nothing to them." "The members have no business to grumble over an extra penny a week," maintained Philip Brewster. "Look what they get done for them while they're in hospital; operations, X-rays, blood-counts, test-means and God knows what, a whole bag of tricks that hadn't even been invented when I was a boy." "Well," said the Mayor stubbornly, "a sick man has a right to the best treatment that's going. If he can't afford to pay it himself, then the State should provide it for him." He always said this when the subject came up and it always irritated Philip Brewster, who grumbled, "That means the money comes out of your pocket and mine. If all the sick folk in the country are to be nursed and doctored free it's going to cost us a pretty penny. The truth is, medicine and surgery have got too expensive nowadays."

This remark was aimed at Dr. Shoesmith, the only medical man present and was meant to stir him into an explosion, but for once old Tom refused battle, shrugging his heavy shoulders. "Yes, we've made too many discoveries," he

admitted, glancing up at the portrait of Captain Yeoman over the mantelpiece. "Look at that one-eyed ruffian up there, grinning at us ; when he founded this hospital money went a lot further than it does now. All we did for the patients then was to put 'em to bed, bleed them and dose them with simples out of the garden. There wasn't any nursing to speak of and the surgeons killed most of their cases out of hand. Those were the days." "Yes," nodded Mr. Ferriman, "and it wasn't too bad either in my great-aunt's day. Wilchester was a prosperous place in the nineteenth century, and charity was the fashion ; the local people took a pride in their hospital and were always ready to help it. Yeoman's got plenty of legacies and subscriptions then ; we could always be sure of collecting the money if we wanted to launch out into anything new. Things are different nowadays. Ever since the last war Yeoman's has been getting poorer and poorer, and I fancy this war is going to put paid to us. You know, we've been going downhill for a long time now. We could fill a couple more wards, if we had them ; we ought to rebuild our nurses' home. We talk about enlarging the out-patients' hall and the surgeons would like another theatre ; but where are we to turn for the money ? I don't know and none of you can tell me." He was always a gloomy man, reflected Captain Chandler, and when he wanted his lunch, as no doubt he did by this time, he became more gloomy than ever.

"If it hadn't been for the war," said Philip Brewster, "we could have put over that big appeal scheme I was so keen about. We'd have set up a special office for it and got in a secretary from outside, for a year, with experience of that class of work, to take the burden off your shoulders, Chandler. We'd have got up all the usual affairs, a dance at the town hall, a public dinner with royalty in the chair if possible, a flag day, special Sunday collections in all the churches, collecting boxes in the shops and all the rest of the racket. We could have worked it in with the Yeoman birthday celebrations," he sighed wistfully, like a child forbidden to go to the circus. "Hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary of his birth, or death, or whatever it might be."

This set off Dr. Shoesmith on one of his antiquarian reminiscences. "On the fiftieth anniversary," he related, "there was a special service at Saint Blazey's and the Mayor and Corporation attended in state to hear the Yeoman sermon. The church was exceedingly crowded and many people could not find seats. A collection was taken at the doors which

amounted to over three hundred pounds. The service was followed at three o'clock by a public dinner in the town hall which was attended by every one of note in Wilchester. The Duke took the chair and sent in two bucks from his deer park towards the cost of the dinner. In the evening the favourite oratorio of *Judas Maccabeus* was performed in the hall of the Grammar School." He sounded as if he were quoting from a contemporary account and probably he was; the old man had his mind stuffed with that sort of rubbish. "He's breaking up," thought the much-enduring secretary, noting that it was almost half-past twelve. "Three hundred pounds wouldn't take us far nowadays," snapped Philip Brewster, who never took much interest in the senior Physician's historical digressions.

The treasurer retorted, without much sympathy, "These big appeal schemes cost a thousand or so to put over, even in peace-time, before you clear your expenses. If you went and started one right in the middle of the biggest war in history it wouldn't get you anywhere. Really, gentlemen, I don't see how we're to carry on much longer. The class of people who've always kept us going won't have any money left themselves when the war's over. Every week now we seem to hear from some old subscriber cutting down his cheque or crying off altogether. We could close a couple of wards, of course; no use looking like that, Miss Farmer, we shall have to come to it presently. Even so, we're only putting off the evil day. We shall get squeezed out of existence in the end and have to let ourselves be taken over by the State, I suppose."

"Well, what's so dreadful about that," objected the Mayor, ruffling up a little. "Charity can't keep this place struggling along for ever; charity will have to give in. We don't get a quarter of our income from charity as it is; the rest is either grants out of public money, or else it comes out of the patients' pockets. The time's gone by for folk to go round touching their caps for what they ought to get by rights." Philip Brewster, who was probably getting hungry himself, muttered something irritable about too much independence all round; and Miss Farmer broke out in her quivering eager voice, "I can't bear to hear you sneer at charity; it's a lovely virtue. How could the world go on if we didn't all help one another." Her eyes filled with tiresome tears, and the colour mounted in her face, as she gazed defiantly round the table. The men avoided her eye and looked embarrassed, then Dr. Shoesmith burst out,

"Independence is a very good thing; all I say is, let me keep mine. I don't intend to have an open mind about this business; I think I've lived long enough to be entitled to a few prejudices. I've never spared myself; I've done my work and been paid for it, besides a lot more work that I never was paid for. I've had a pretty hard life, but I don't grumble about that. All I say is, I'm too old to take a new master. I don't intend to spend my last years of practice filling in forms and taking orders from civil servants. You can't teach an old dog new tricks. If Yeoman's is going to be taken over by some ministry, or run by the town council; no offence to you Mr. Mayor, but I'm clearing out. Let the young people take on the job and see whether they can make it work. I shall have had enough." He shook his white head and glared round him, a big burly obstinate old man, with a mind as knotted and tough as an oak-tree. Nobody liked to speak after him, and there was an odd pause; then Mr. Ferriman, in his soft Quaker voice, concluded, "Well, something's got to be done. This place is dying by inches."

CHAPTER FIVE

A LITTLE after half-past twelve the board meeting came to an end and the members dispersed. Dr. Shoesmith lingered to the last, with a word to say to Captain Chandler about a case he wanted to get in. As he walked down the passage by himself towards the main door the old man felt tired and dispirited, but he cheered up a little when he saw Miss Dean emerge from the residents' room, just ahead and turn towards him. He always had a soft corner in his heart for a handsome girl and he particularly approved of this one. He surveyed her with pleasure as she came up to him, with her hands in the pockets of her white coat and her stethoscope swinging from her neck. She had a particularly graceful walk, he reflected; and he liked her shining chestnut head, as neat as a nut, and the delicate lively hazel eye that went with it. In his youth he had always admired a horse and a girl of that colour. She was an exceedingly cool and competent young woman. Even Richard Groom, who never liked being put off with a woman assistant, grudgingly admitted that

Miss Dean was exceptionally neat-fingered, did not tire easily, never lost her head in an emergency, never got in his way, or blinked an eyelid at his language in the theatre. She had excellent nerves, got on well with the sisters, did not muddle the out-patient work and had several times surprised him by the assurance and accuracy of her diagnosis. Dr. Shoesmith approved of Sophia very much. He had never cared for soft yielding women, afraid to make their own decisions, always crying out for a man's help; he liked a girl with some courage in her, who was ready for adventure and had plenty of faith in her own powers. Sophia was obviously prepared to make her own mistakes and stand by them. If she took a tumble she would pick herself up, rub her bruises and go on again without grumbling. Just at present, to be sure, she was plunging about all over the place, like a wild young filly, lashing out at every obstacle. She had a high spirit, as he very well knew, but she had not yet quite learned how to control it. She knew something about surgery, but very little about life. She was in too much of a hurry, like all these quick-stepping confident girls, she wanted the world made over again to suit her. In the course of a long life the old man had seen plenty like her. She had time before her, she could learn; when she had swallowed and digested a few more disappointments she would steady down into a reliable woman. He was interested in her future and particularly anxious to secure her for Yeoman's, so he said to her, with a twinkle under his white eyebrows. "They were talking about you in there just now," and jerked his head back at the door of the board-room.

Sophia gave him a look of keen curiosity, but she did not speak, though her lips parted. He said, wagging his head at her, "Ah! I shan't tell you what they were saying. You might like it and then again you mightn't." He enjoyed teasing her and she for her part endured it with a smiling ease which delighted him. She was never on the defensive with him as she seemed to be with the younger men. Old Tom had noticed that slightly hostile air of hers when she was among her contemporaries and it had worried him a little, but he supposed comfortably, that one day some young man would get through her guard. Meanwhile he continued to smile at her as he informed her, "We've told Captain Chandler to advertise that R.S.O. job."

Her bright expectant look certainly changed in some way as he watched her. He could not quite tell what she was thinking. "They haven't excluded women, have they, sir?"

she murmured and he shook his head. "No, they haven't" said he, adding bluntly, "They'd like to, but they can't. I told them they'd have to move with the times. They've got to advertise the job as a matter of form, but they won't find the sort of man they want in the middle of this war. The young ones are all overseas and they won't have another of these refugee doctors. Practically speaking, it's going to lie between you and Dick Groom, and I'm not the only person in this town who doesn't mean to see that young man dig himself in at Yeoman's. His father and I have been at loggerheads all our days, but we respect each other; I can't abide Richard Groom, but he knows his job, I will say that for him. With the boy it's a different matter. He's a lazy, inefficient untrustworthy young devil," said old Tom with fierce indiscretion. "Maybe I shouldn't say so to you, but I know you can keep your mouth shut. You've seen him at work, you won't make any mistake about him. One of these days he'll do something to get himself into trouble." The girl nodded her chestnut head and her brilliant hazel eyes sparkled with intelligence. "Dick's an obstinate conceited young fool, if ever I saw one," concluded Dr. Shoesmith. "I don't grudge any man his chance, I hope; but God forgive me! I'd do a lot to shift Dick Groom out of Yeoman's Hospital."

He coughed and seemed to become aware of his own violence. Perhaps a little ashamed of his explosion, he said gruffly, "Well, my girl, that's about the size of it. If you want to get your foot in the door here, it's now or never; so you'd better sit down and copy out your testimonials and make your application."

Rather to his chagrin she did not immediately answer. She walked beside him with her neat head bent, frowning at the tiled red floor of the passage. Old Tom wondered what on earth was the matter with the girl. She had seemed keen enough when he sounded her last about the matter. In fact, he was not at all sure that she had not herself put the scheme into his head. For the first time it occurred to him that she looked paler and thinner than she used to do, as if she needed a good holiday, or as if she had something on her mind which was spoiling her sleep; but before he could get as far as asking her, "What's wrong with you?" she had murmured, "I don't know that I am putting in for it."

Dr. Shoesmith stopped dead and glowered at her. The domineering old man had reached that time of life when he

could not bear to have his little plans set aside, and this was to have been the final move in his long battle with Richard Groom. He exclaimed, "Bless me! what's the meaning of this?" and with gathering resentment, "Why, I thought you'd made up your mind! Most women play for safety; if they don't stick to baby work, they take a public health job or go in for something with reasonably limited hours, like anæsthetics; but surgery's your game, and you know it. You've told me that, time and again. You didn't mean to spend your days looking at school children's dirty heads, or giving the dope while somebody else had the fun of the operation. You said this job would just fill in the time for you, while you were getting ready to take your F.R.C.S. You talked about putting your plate up here in Wilchester afterwards and going in for all this orthopædic work that you're so keen on. You would have it there was room for a woman consultant in the county, you'd got everything worked out. I've been doing all I could for you," he grumbled, "and now you talk about letting me down. I don't like all this chopping and changing, young woman. You'll never get anywhere in this world till you've made up your mind where exactly you think you're going."

He was really angry with her and it did not soften him to have her retort with a flash of her brilliant eyes, "I suppose I can change my mind." However, while he was still glowering at her and before he could get out the complaint, "That's always the trouble with women," she had recovered her good manners and with the utmost charm she said to him, "Please, I want your advice. I've just heard about a job that's going up in London, at my own old hospital. They were telling me about it when I went up last week. Somebody's left them a packet of money to start an orthopædic unit, and my old chief would give me a five-year job on it as his assistant. I could set up for myself in London on the strength of it and I could build up a practice on the side. By the end of the five years, with any luck, I could get on to the staff there. It really would be a big thing for me, sir." She gazed at him pleadingly.

Bitterly disappointed, the old man tugged at his white beard. "It sounds like a good job," he admitted grudgingly, "That is, if you can get it." She retorted with a flash of the fire which he liked to see in young people, "I'm pretty sure I could if I tried, sir," and to that he could only reply sulkily, "Well, of course there's nothing here to compare with it. I can see that. You'll turn up your nose at Yeoman's now,

if you've got your head full of nonsense about Harley Street and big fees and a consulting practice. We can't hope to keep you, unless it's for a few months, just as a stop-gap. That's not what I'd wanted," and with a deep sigh, of which

- he was probably quite unconscious, he shrugged his shoulders and said heavily, "Yes, now we shall lose you, I suppose."

She gave him a clouded, troubled look, most uncharacteristic of her and murmured, "Then you do think I ought to make the move, sir?" He thought crossly, "Why can't the girl make up her own mind without bothering me at the end of my busy morning? She doesn't really want my advice; she only wants me to listen while she tells me what's she's decided. Women are all the same. I ought to know that by this time"; and he said out loud, in his bluff way, "Don't try to put the responsibility on me, my girl. I can't make up your mind for you."

She astonished him by saying, "I wish you could," and rubbed her forehead with the back of her slender wrist as if it ached. He wondered once again what was the matter with her this morning and stared at her so thoughtfully that she coloured up. "I'm sorry to bother you, sir," she apologised. "I know I've got to work it out for myself."

Somewhat ashamed of his own impatience, Dr. Shoesmith confessed, "I didn't mean to discourage you. I expect you ought to go to London if you can, but to tell you the truth, I shall be very much disappointed if you do. I'd set my heart on keeping you at Yeoman's. You had a chance here, you know; a pretty good chance, though perhaps I've no right to say so. We're not so far behind the times down here as you young folks like to think. Plenty of people in and about this town would have backed you up; not only about this resident job, that's just something to pass the time, but when you came to settle in the place for good. You wouldn't have found the door shut in your face, you'd have been given time to show what you could do." She listened attentively, but her expression did not change, and he felt that she was slipping out of his reach. "Well, what's the use of talking about it?" he grumbled. "You won't be here. Now that you've got this London notion into your head you'll never be content with Yeoman's, I suppose it seems a poor place to you, a dirty, makeshift, old-fashioned struggling hospital, only fit to be pulled down and done away with."

He glared at her, tugging at his white beard and was not mollified when she replied, "I do think it ought to be

pulled down, Dr. Shoesmith, but not done away with." He could not find anything more to say to her, as she continued eagerly, "I should like to see it completely rebuilt. It ought to be twice the size, it ought to be entirely replanned. It should be the centre of a much larger district, with its own ring of cottage hospitals and convalescent homes round it; it ought to have a bigger staff and better equipment." He grumbled, "Yes, I dare say; but where's the money to come from? We can scarcely make ends meet as it is," and she began eagerly to tell him the remedies in which her generation believed. "Yeoman's ought not to have to beg its way. Charity can't run the place as it ought to be run; what's wanted is a bigger contributory scheme and a State grant"; but he waved his hands at her and grumbled, "Yes, I know, everything's to be done by a pack of clerks sticking on stamps. I've heard enough about that. Sawyer rams it down my throat every time we have a board meeting." She smiled at that, and he apologised, "I dare say you're right; I dare say all these fine schemes can be got to work, but I'm an old man and I've heard a good many of them in my time. A lot of queer things are going to happen to the voluntary hospitals of this country in the next quarter of a century. There are changes coming all right and coming fast; I shan't see them, perhaps, but you young people will. I've spent all my working days at Yeoman's; I've watched it growing and changing, maybe I've done something to make it what it is. I'm fond of the old place, I admit; I shouldn't care to see it get squeezed out and disappear. I don't want it to be swallowed up by some Whitehall ministry, or handed over to the town council, where men like Brewster and Sawyer can play about with it and muddle up and ruin it. Yeoman's has been a good place in its time and I worry a lot over what's to become of it." He shrugged his heavy shoulders and concluded humbly, "You see, I've been here all my life."

2

They had reached the front hall and the lift. Sophia halted there and put her hand on the latch of it: she smiled at Dr. Shoesmith and he nodded dismissal. "I talk too much," said he gruffly. "It's a bad fault in an old gentleman, but you think over what I've been saying." She nodded her chestnut head, looking, he fancied, a little thoughtful. "Off with you now," said he. "I've wasted enough of your

time. You want to get back to your work, I expect." She assured him hastily, "I'm done for the morning. Mr. Groom's operating at two, but I'm free till then. I thought I'd just time to go up to the path-lab before lunch. There's been some mistake about a report on one of Mr. Groom's test-meals and he'll want to see it when he comes. I was going up to ask Dr. Marriner about it."

"It strikes me that nephew of mine isn't doing his work properly these days," Dr. Shoesmith said testily. "I ordered a blood-count on a leukæmia I've got in Sydenham, but it wasn't ready for me this morning. They swore it hadn't come down. I'll come up with you, I think, and make a row about it myself." He glanced at the big clock over the front door; but it showed twenty to one and he shook his head. "No, I can't do it," he grumbled. "I haven't time; I ought to be at home by now, I've a long round to do this afternoon and I ought to be out at Littlefold by two. If you're going up to see Neil, my girl, ask him what in hell he's done with that blood-count. Haul him over the coals for me, will you? Tell him to pull himself together." And with one of his sly backhanders he concluded, "You'll do it better than I shall. I don't care about having a row with the boy myself, but I fancy you'll enjoy it." And he peered at her sharply to see how she would take that.

She exclaimed furiously, "Really, I think Neil must be out of his mind these days, he muddles everything. I don't know what's the matter with him!" and then she blushed. The colour which ran up into her pale face was so vivid and furious a scarlet that the old man could only stare at her, astonished by her violence. She bit her lip, and he saw her hand clench tightly where it rested on the lift door. Some months back Captain Chandler, an incurable gossip, had hinted to him that there might be something between Dr. Marriner and Miss Dean, but Dr. Shoesmith had not taken much notice, thinking it was only another bit of corridor tattle. In a small hospital, where people lived in one another's pockets half the time, there was always that sense of suspicion. Wherever you went and whatever you did, somebody was watching you. Old Tom had a nose like a hound for a love-story and here he suddenly got a whiff of an odd one.

It certainly did not please him. His nephew Neil Marriner, the hospital pathologist, hunched over his microscope up there on the top-floor of Yeoman's, among his test-tubes and reagents, was an uncommonly queer fellow. Nobody knew

that better than his uncle. Neil very likely did want a wife, but this girl would never suit him. For all her pretty looks and her polite ways, she had a tremendous will of her own ; if he was not mistaken, she thought of nothing and nobody but herself. The words rose unbidden in his mind. "Neil ought to marry a kind woman." He did not know how far Sophia was to be trusted in an affair of the heart ; if she was going to upset that young man, Tom Shoesmith might yet live to regret that she had ever come to Yeoman's. He knit his shaggy eyebrows and stood tapping his right middle finger into the palm of his left hand, a habit he had when he was considering a difficult diagnosis. The whole hospital knew old Tom's trick when he was puzzled, and the girl standing before him knew it as well as any one, but she did nothing to help him out. He would have been vexed if he had known how accurately she followed his train of thought. He glanced at the clock again impatiently, as if he hoped that it might have stood still for him, but it said inexorably, fifteen minutes to one. "All right," said old Tom, "you take him." He dismissed her with a wave of his hand, acknowledged Sergeant Forester's smart salute and marched out to his car.

3

Sophia Dean shut herself into the old-fashioned lift with a clash of sliding metal, pressed the button and was carried with a slow sighing progress to the very top of the building. There in a converted attic right under the roof, scorching hot in summer, freezing cold in winter, Neil Marriner, the overworked hospital pathologist, carried on his routine work for Yeoman's. In his spare time, which was not extensive, he did analyses and so forth for the local faculty and tried to carry out a little research of his own. Sophia Dean had known him up in London, at the teaching hospital where she had trained and when he threw up his appointment there for reasons of his own and came down to Yeoman's, she had followed him. For the moment he was, as Dr. Shoesmith had begun to suspect, the most important problem in her life. As she walked down the passage she met the lab-boy coming away to his lunch and he nodded when she asked him, "Is Dr. Marriner inside, Georgie?" but when she pushed open the door the room seemed deserted. It was a bright white cell, walled with rows of glass bottles and specimen jars ; and a distillation was boiling quietly away by itself, with a purring bubble, in a complicated structure

of flasks and coiled glass tubing, on the scrubbed oaken bench beside the sink. She heard the gentle roar of the blue flame under the sand-bath and saw the thin trickle of a coloured liquid spreading itself over the walls of the condensing flask. A couple of guinea-pigs, nibbling lettuce in a cage, sat up and blinked at her, then returned to their meal; but there seemed to be nobody else at home. The wide north window showed a row of frosted panes and above them a breadth of sky, with the trail of a fighter-plane scrawled across it, an arabesque of white vapour feathering out and disappearing like a ship's wake in the calm blue midday sky. Sophia hesitated with her hand on the door, then shut it quietly behind her and advanced towards the apparatus, putting one foot before the other as delicately as a cat in a strange place; but she was halted in her tracks before she got to the sink by a voice behind her, which said sharply, "Don't touch that."

A young man emerged from a kind of cupboard in the wall, a tall bony creature, ten years older than herself, with ginger hair and high freckled cheekbones, frowning and obviously in a bad temper, carrying a trayful of spirit with a lump of tissue floating in it. He took this load carefully in both hands across to the sink and set it down there before he said, standing with his back to her, in a most unwelcoming voice, "Well, what do *you* want?"

Sophia retorted crisply, "It's not what I want, it's what Mr. Groom will want, your report on that fractional test-meal from Lister. It should have come down yesterday. He'll raise hell if he doesn't get it."

The young man did not answer immediately. He turned on a tap and began to wash his hands. Sophia raised her voice to overcome the splash of the water. "Old Tom's got a bone to pick with you too," she informed him. "He wants to know what you've done with a blood-count of his from Sydenham; a leukaemia of sorts. He says it ought to have been ready for him this morning. He told me to come up and make a row about it." The tap was turned off abruptly half-way through this speech, and her own voice sounded disconcertingly loud and shrewish in the quiet laboratory. The young man turned away and began to dry his hands on the stained roller towel behind the door. "You seem to be doing that all right, my dear," he told her.

Their eyes met in a stare of extreme resentment. "Well, if you won't take it from me," said Sophia after a moment, biting her lip, "you'll have to take it from him." And she

sat down suddenly on the high stool, beside the shining microscope, as if she felt too tired to stand up any longer.

Neil Marriner turned away and began to rummage among papers on a desk, but did not immediately lay his hand on what he wanted. "I've had 'em both here, I think," he muttered angrily, "but they went down to the wards again. I'm pretty sure of it. Those damned nurses lose everything." He continued to toss his papers this way and that, snatched up one and thrust it at her. "There's your test-meal," said he fiercely. "You can take it down with you if you're in such a hurry for it." She glanced over the request-paper, with Richard Groom's initials jotted down in one corner and her own neat handwriting and Neil's scrawl filling up the rest of the particulars. She had begun to say, "Yes, that's it; I don't know why you couldn't have let us have it sooner," when she found him staring foolishly at a second paper, which had been buried under the others. She looked over his shoulder and saw at once what it was, the second request-paper, with a typed line or two at the top and Dr. Shoemith's crabbed signature at the bottom; nothing more. Neil had not touched that piece of work; the materials for it must be somewhere about the laboratory, very likely spoilt by this time. The young man stared at it and put his hand up to his forehead; all his freckles stood out suddenly and he looked quite white and wild. "I never saw it; I swear I never saw it," he muttered to himself.

The girl gave him a glance of dismay. "It's a good thing it's your uncle's bloodcount you forgot," said she, "and not Mr. Groom's test-meal. Old Tom might pass it over, but he wouldn't. This isn't the first muddle you've made lately. I can tell you one thing, if you go on like this you'll lose your job." The young man made no reply and she burst out at him, "I don't know what's the matter with you these days." He seemed for the moment not to hear her, then he muttered in a lost sort of way, "I can't do my work. I'm all in a muddle; half the time I forget what I'm doing." She gave him at that a sudden attentive look, as if he were one of her patients. "Are you having trouble with that ulcer of yours again?" she demanded sharply. "If you are, you're a fool to try and keep on working. You know what your uncle said"; and as the young man merely looked sulky she went on, "You ought to rest, Neil, you ought to diet, you ought to cut down these eternal cigarettes of yours. You ought to go to bed for three weeks and let him treat you

properly, and if that doesn't work you ought to let Mr. Groom do a short-circuit." He shrugged his shoulders, and she burst out at him, "If you go on like this, Neil, you'll kill yourself."

He turned on her savagely, and his freckles stood out muddy brown on his pale face. "Oh, for God's sake, Sophy, stop nagging at me," he cried. "You've got what you came up for, you've proved I was wrong. Why can't you clear out and leave me alone?" And he confessed after a sullen pause, "Of course I'm having trouble with my ulcer. I should think you could see that for yourself."

Both of these young people knew perfectly well what was the matter with Neil Marriner. He had had a duodenal ulcer for over twelve months and it was getting worse. Any dresser, putting in his first three months on a surgical ward, could have diagnosed the case. It presented all the classical symptoms; pain coming on from two to four hours after food, and at night, relieved by alkalis and by vomiting; rigidity and tenderness under the right ribs, occurring most commonly in a male subject between thirty and fifty years of age. It was the kind of case that you prayed for and never got, when you were up for your final examinations; both Neil and Sophia used to rattle off the list of signs and symptoms glibly when they were students, thinking nothing of them.

Neil knew all about a duodenal ulcer now from quite a different angle; the hungry craving pain coming and going with its own inexorable punctuality, so precisely located that it felt like a red-hot coin, slowly burning its way through him from front to back, on the right-hand side, under his ribs. He could look in the glass now, when he got up in the morning, and see just the sort of face that you expected to go with that story, when you met it in out-patients, a drawn and haggard countenance, pale from slight but continuous internal bleeding. It was the face of an overworked and undernourished young man, who was afraid to eat for fear of pain, who had not had a square meal, or a holiday, or a good night's rest, for more than a year; a sedentary worker who crouched over his bench all day long, gulped hasty and irregular meals, smoked continually, worried about his money troubles and his professional prospects and laboured under the stress of a harassing love-affair. Neil had done his own test-meal and seen his own X-ray films, though not until he had been bullied into it by his uncle. He knew the rising curve of his own gastric acidity after a meal, climbing

as his pain increased and had examined the hour-glass shadow of his own tormented stomach. He knew his own cure, too, but had not the time to undertake it. It is a good doctor who can cure himself, and Neil was not as good as that yet. He could remember dishing out the correct advice time and again to the men and women who straggled through the out-patient department at St. Catherine's, in the days when he was a newly-qualified house-surgeon, ignorant and cocksure, ready to cure all the ills of the world with a lancet and a bunch of prescriptions. He used to vex his patients then with all the irritating sensible remarks which Sophia had just recited to him. "Take a holiday; don't smoke, don't drink, don't eat anything that disagrees with you; don't worry, don't overwork. What you need is rest."

Sophia was astonished at the short laugh which broke from the young man's mouth. She could not tell that he had suddenly and vividly remembered how patiently those sick people would look at you, while you went through the impossible catalogue, as if they knew more than you did, as if they pitied your ignorance and thought you very young. "Rest, doctor," they would echo with mild surprise. "I can't rest; I've got my work to do." Neil could not rest himself either, now that he was a grown man with his living to earn. He also had work to do, two men's work sometimes, and could not leave it. He continued to crouch over his microscope or his calculations, to smoke his innumerable cigarettes, to miss his meals and send the lab-boy down to the canteen for sandwiches and a pot of black coffee. He hid biscuits in the drawer under the bench and nibbled them when the pain began to nag him, he kept a bottle of thick bismuth mixture in the cupboard with his reagents and dosed himself with that every four hours. When the acidity-pain became intolerable, he had learnt from his out-patients to stick two fingers down his throat, vomit up the sour burning remains of his last meal into the sink, wipe his wet face and go back to the bench. Yet he persisted to Sophia, when she bothered him about it, "I'm not ill, I'm only overdriven and under the weather; I can't take a holiday just yet. It's all very well being sick when you've the leisure and the convenience for it. People like me haven't time to be ill these days. Uncle Tom thought that last mixture of his was doing me good."

He did not deceive himself or the girl. She said to him in the cross voice of a mother who sees her child running into danger, "Dr. Shoesmith's just as bad as you are. He'll

let you run on till the damned thing perforates, and then you'll have to be operated on in a hurry. Mr. Groom wouldn't have let you hang about like this. He'd have had you on the table months ago."

Neil grinned again, this time rather uncomfortably. "Yes, he'd have had his knife into me by this time, the old devil; but Uncle Tom belongs to a different school. He thinks a duodenal ulcer has a nervous origin. He says a quiet life would cure me," and with a keen look at the handsome girl he concluded, "Remember what he told me last time; that I wanted a wife to look after me!"

"I don't suppose he meant me," retorted Sophia, but her colour rose and she knew it. That schoolgirl blush of hers, the only uncertain thing about her, put her at a continual disadvantage with Neil. He had the art of calling it up and seemed to delight in it. "I don't suppose he did," the young man retorted. "Uncle Tom and his wife would like me to marry somebody who was just your opposite, I fancy. You're not exactly soothing syrup, are you, my dear? I don't think you'd be Uncle Tom's prescription." And his smile faded from his lips.

Sophia gave him a troubled look. "I sometimes think," she murmured, "that he's beginning to have his suspicions of us." Neil shrugged his shoulders. "Very likely," he agreed carelessly. "You can't fool all the people all the time and Uncle Tom's got a pretty sharp eye in his head. I dare say he isn't the only one, you can't keep a secret in a place like this. Was he on at you about it?"

She looked down and moved her foot about. "Well, he was really on at me about staying down here. I met him in the corridor outside the board room. He said they'd been discussing my chances for the R.S.O. job and told me I was quite a hot favourite. So then, of course, I had to warn him that I might be going back to London." Neil gave her a hard stare at that, which she faced as calmly as she could. "I didn't know you meant to tell the old chap yet," she said, frowning.

Sophia murmured, "He got it out of me somehow. You know what an old devil he is when it comes to cross-examination." Neil uttered a short laugh, he had suffered from his uncle's amiable curiosity all his life. "I did tell him I hadn't made up my mind yet," the girl pleaded.

"You'll have to make up your mind pretty quickly, one way or the other," Neil pointed out. "There isn't all that much time, is there?" And he added with his most disagree-

able air, "Uncle Tom will be sorry if you go back to London and so will a few other people, but there's one person who'll be delighted to hear you're going, and that's young Groom. You'll clear the ground nicely for him, won't you?"

"His engagement's in the paper this morning," Sophia replied. "We were all having to congratulate him at breakfast time. He's uncommonly pleased with himself, he thinks he's done a grand bit of work. I tell you one thing, though, Neil; he and his girl are going along to look at that house of Dr. Painter's this afternoon." She gave Neil a significant look, but he remained quite unmoved. "They can save themselves the trouble," he replied. "I rang up Painter last night and he gave me a week's refusal."

Sophia bit her lip, looking both startled and vexed. "You didn't tell me you were going to do that," she complained in her turn. "I do think you might have consulted me first." "No use hanging about while you make up your mind," Neil retorted sulkily. "That house will get snapped up before we can turn round. I had an idea young Groom would be after it, that was why I got busy. I don't know what you're making such a fuss about. I thought you liked the place. You said you did."

She murmured, "It isn't a bad house," with obvious reluctance. She had been inside it two or three times, visiting Dr. Painter, an elderly widower, the cleverest of the five general practitioners of Wilchester, and one of Neil's few friends. It was a Queen Anne dolls'-house of red brick, half-way down the crooked lane called Friar's Entry, squeezed into a quiet corner between the yard of the Fleece Inn and the back of Carter's shop. It had no garden, only a flagged courtyard and the panelled rooms were small, but it faced south and had a pleasant charm of its own. It would make a good place for two young people to be quietly happy in together. Now that Dr. Painter meant to retire and live with his married daughter, he was ready to sell. Neil Marriner had taken a fancy to the place and Sophia and he had discussed its possibilities pretty thoroughly. When he now exclaimed, however, "I don't understand what's the matter with you this morning. Where else are we to live in Wilchester, if we don't buy Painter's house?" she burst out at him. "You know I haven't made up my mind about coming to live in Wilchester. You're trying to rush me into it."

They exchanged a completely hostile look. The girl's eyes were sparkling with anger, but the young man appeared

quite unmoved by her vexation. "You can take just one more week to think it over," said he. "After that you can either marry me right away and settle down here with me in Wilchester; or you can say good-bye to me and go back to London, the sooner the better." He added under his breath, "I don't know that I care much which you do, so long as we get this thing settled. It's been hanging about long enough."

He turned his back on her and peered between the bars at the guinea-pigs in their cage. The crumpled skirts of his white coat and the back of his narrow obstinate head were all that the girl had to stare at. "You're not being much help to me, Neil," she complained.

He did not turn, but she heard him mutter, "You'll get no more help from me. You've got to make your own choice, Sophy. I won't do it for you. All you really want is to put the blame on me if things go wrong."

She retorted hotly, "It isn't that, Neil; how can you be so unfair? I've told you all along, I don't see the point of our sticking down here in the provinces all our lives. Yeoman's is a good little hospital, but not good enough for you. I want you to say that you'll come back with me and try your luck again in London."

That made him round on her, with the violent irritability of his disease, "Oh, for God's sake! Sophy, you're not going to bring all that up, are you? We've been over it together, time and again. You know perfectly well where I stand. I've made it plain enough, surely. I don't intend to let you drag me back to London. I've had enough of that scramble. I can't stand the pushing and shoving. My life's settled. I'm staying here for the rest of my days. I don't want to move, I'm perfectly happy in Wilchester. I'm not an ambitious man and I haven't much use for money. I hate the fag of a teaching job and I can't stand having to work under another man. This isn't a very big hospital, I grant you, but it's well-managed and at least I'm my own master here. I can do my routine jobs at my own time, in my own way and later on, when I'm not so rushed, I can take time off for research."

They eyed each other stubbornly and the girl complained, "What about my work? Am I to give that up?"

"You talk as if there weren't any sick people worth curing except up in London," Neil retorted. "There's plenty of work to be done down here, God knows! You've a perfectly good opening ready for you here and I thought you'd made

up your mind to take it. Where's the sense in all this chopping and changing? What you mean is that you won't have any particular notice taken of you if you stay down here in Wilchester. Well, if you feel that way you'd better clear out. I don't want a resentful wife, always fretting at being tied down to a place she hates. You can stay here willingly, or not at all." He drew a long breath and pleaded, with an obvious effort, in a more reasonable tone, "Come, Sophy, I've never deceived you about this, have I? I've told you all along that I meant to stay here. Didn't you think I meant what I said?"

She murmured, avoiding his stern eye, "I thought you might change your mind after a little," and he retorted bitterly, "Or else hoped you to change it for me. Well, you've had a damn' good try, haven't you? I suppose a woman always thinks she can make a man change his mind, if only she nags at him for long enough. You're an obstinate devil, aren't you, Sophy?"

They exchanged resentful looks and the girl reminded him, choosing her words very carefully, "You weren't yourself when you came here, Neil. You'd had a bad knock, I didn't think you were in a fit state to make a big decision." The young man burst out at her, interrupting her, refusing to let her go on. "Why don't you say what you mean? I know what you'd like to tell me; that I'd queered my own pitch, had a row with my chief and refused to apologise to him, lost my temper and my job together. Isn't that what you mean? You can speak up, I'm not a baby."

The girl set her lips firmly and would not answer him, perhaps because she could not trust herself to do it quietly. "Well," admitted Neil, a shade less violently, "that's all true enough and you've a right to remind me of it if you choose; but it's over and done with now. I dare say you thought I was only coming down here to save my face, till the row with the St. Catherine's people had blown over. I suppose you thought my uncle had worked the job for me, in a place where he could pull all the strings, and where nobody would bother much about the sort of temper I had, so long as I could show them decent testimonials. It must have looked to you as if I'd buried myself in the first hole I saw, just to cool off a bit. When I asked you to come down here yourself..." His voice failed him as he looked at her eager vivid face. "When you asked me to come here," she accused him quickly, "you said you couldn't do without me."

A queer expression crossed the young man's face, he looked troubled and afraid. "No more I can," he started to say, but when she took a quick step towards him he drew back from her, shaking his head. "I'm not going to let you drag me away from the place I've found for myself. I love this town, Sophy, I don't ask anything better than to spend the rest of my days in it. I want to sit down quietly here and be happy, I want to be left to do my work in peace."

"I simply don't understand you," she retorted. "You don't want to get on in the world, you don't mean to be bothered with other people and their affairs, all you want is to shut yourself up in a corner. You don't care what happens to anybody but yourself. You don't even," she concluded in a sudden small forlorn voice, "care what becomes of me."

At that he turned on her. "Leave me alone," he commanded. "You've got to leave me alone. You knew the sort of man I was when you took up with me, but you couldn't be content with me as I was. I know your sort; you can't let a man live in peace, you've got to be altering everything. You're an ambitious woman, Sophy: you don't want to waste your life down here, you think you can do better for yourself up in London. Very well, then, go. I shan't raise a finger to keep you. All I say is, you shan't mess up my life for me. I won't hang on to your skirts, I won't let you domineer over me. You ride me too hard, Sophy, and I can't stand it any longer. We make each other wretched, we fight and quarrel all the time. I'm sick and tired of it, I tell you. I don't want that sort of wife, I don't want that sort of marriage. If we can't agree we'd better part company."

They stared at one another, the brilliant self-willed girl with a fire in her heart, the young man hard as a stone. Neither would give way and she heard him mutter, "Sometimes I wish I'd never seen you." She began to say something, she did not know what, in excuse of herself; but at that moment the neglected distillation boiled over with a gush of steam and a sharp ominous crack of breaking glass. The distracted young man snatched with one hand at the stem of the Bunsen burner, while with the other he tried to steady the toppling apparatus. The girl snatched up a cloth and attempted to rescue the flask, but it was too late. The vessel cracked clean in half, the liquid hissed out and extinguished the flame and Neil was left wringing his scalded

fingers. "Get out of here, for Christ's sake," said he, "and leave me alone."

Sophia opened her mouth to speak, shut it again, turned on her heel and went. Dr. Marriner began vexedly to mop up his bench and collect the pieces of glass, but before he had done half he was overcome by such pain and nausea that he had to stop. He got as far as the sink, but then his heart seemed to turn over and the old scalding pain and, sickness tore through him. After that the pain itself was better, though it did not quite go away, but he felt desperately faint and had to lean his forehead against the tiled wall. He was still sitting in his chair, with his head in his hands when the lab-boy came whistling back from lunch, as cheerful as a sparrow. "Here, Georgie," said Dr. Marriner, "clear up all that mess and don't make such a blasted row. No, I don't want any sandwiches to-day; I can't be bothered with them. As soon as the wards are open again I'm going down to Sydenham."

4

Going down in the lift and walking along the tiled corridor, Sophia told herself wearily, "This thing has got to stop. I can't endure it any longer." Neil Marriner and Sophia Dean had known each other for almost three years and for more than half that time they had been desperately and reluctantly in love. Sophia could remember as clearly as if it had been yesterday the moment at which she first set eyes on Neil. It was down in the cold tiled post-mortem room at St. Catherine's, the first time she ever went there and Neil was engaged upon some particularly unsavoury piece of work. He was all dressed up in a mackintosh apron, with a check pinafore tied round him and thick rubber gloves on his hands, frowning and cutting away; and every now and then he wiped his hands on the front of his stained pinafore and barked out bits of reluctant information to the ring of students gathered round the slate slab. Sophia thought that she had never seen a more disagreeable young man.

It was her first experience of that dreary and sinister room and she did not like the smell of it at all, it was much worse than the dissecting room, which she had never minded. The men round her had all got their pipes going for that very reason and she lit a cigarette, quite innocently, to keep herself in countenance. Neil paused with his hands in the

belly of the corpse, fixed her with a hard blue eye and said, "I won't have you women smoking cigarettes down here. The next thing I know you'll be parking it on the corner of the slab and picking it up again covered with God knows what. Put it out at once." Sophia reddened angrily, dropped her newly-lighted cigarette and ground it out with her foot, and all the men grinned at one another.

Neil went on tugging away at the liver until he got it out, pushed it under her nose and said, "Now perhaps you can tell me what this chap died of." He seemed put about when she gave him a reasonably adequate answer and demanded sulkily, "Where did you find all that?" She curtly gave him the reference to the appropriate text-book, not meaning to sound superior, though perhaps she did, and Neil commented with a good deal of sarcasm, "Oh! you read, do you? That's most unusual, Miss Dean." She blushed furiously, for she hated being tricked into showing off and all the men grinned again, while Neil returned to the gall-bladder. Afterwards they said to her, "You mustn't take any notice of Dr. Marriner, Miss Dean. He's always like that; he hates having women about the place and does his best to catch 'em out. He's a clever devil, too clever by half. They say he'll be the next director of pathology, if he doesn't quarrel with too many people first." She thought him a singularly unpleasant person and was sorry that she had got to clerk for him. Such had been the unpropitious beginnings of their loves.

During the next three months they were obliged to see one another daily. Neil hated having students filling up the laboratory, getting in his way and interrupting his work. He would have been perfectly happy if he could have stayed up there all day by himself, freezing, cutting and mounting his fragments of tissue, staining his smears of blood and pus, peering down his microscope, cooking up his batches of culture in the incubator, fiddling about with neat-fingered accuracy among his flasks and test-tubes, his coloured bottles of stains and reagents, his specimens of urine, serum and gastric juice. He was fascinated by the exquisite certainty of the scientific world in which he dwelt, that region where everything obeyed its own natural laws and there was no human factor to upset his calculations. "People," Sophia had once burst out at him, after she got to know him too well for her own happiness; "people are what you'll never understand. They upset you, they spoil your nice neat little plans, you don't know how to manage them. The more you

see of men, the more you like microbes." She made him laugh at the time, and the phrase became for a time a joke between them, but afterwards it had festered in her mind and in his, like a poisonous burr. It was quite true; Neil could not manage people. At the bottom of his heart he disliked and dreaded his own species.

Walking down the corridor, with her hands in her pockets, staring at the ground, Sophia thought, "I don't wonder, really, that Neil lost his job at St. Catherine's. Even if he hadn't had that row with his chief, he was hopeless as a teacher, he hadn't any patience with his students or their mistakes. He knew his stuff, of course, nobody better, but he couldn't pass it on. The truth is, Neil's blessed or cursed with one of those minds like a very brightly polished convex mirror. He sees everything crystal-clear with a sharp edge, in perfect focus; he simply doesn't begin to understand what woolly minds ordinary people have got. He used to stare at us as if he thought we were being stupid on purpose. Of course he's brilliantly clever, it's the first thing people say about him. He shot ahead of everybody else as long as it was a question of scholarship. He collected all the honours and distinctions that were going. Exams never worry a man like Neil. He's got one of those marvellous visual memories, he sees the whole page of the proper textbook inside his head, with a bright light on it, and he simply reads off the answers. Of course he came out top of all the lists, but then exams aren't everything. His work is child's play to him; it's real life he can't manage. He can't loosen up, he can't take things easily; he's shut up inside himself, always afraid of being hurt. I don't know how he got like that, I don't understand the way he's made. He and I are absolutely different. I'm his opposite in every way, I do go out to meet people, I'm greedy about experience, I'll try anything new, I'm afraid of nothing and nobody. Neil isn't like that. He wants to be solitary; if such a thing is possible he wants to be free." She took one hand out of her pocket, rubbed her eyes with her knuckles and told herself, as she had done many times before, "It was frightfully bad luck for him that he ever met me. We never meant to fall in love with each other, it hasn't been a happy business. We both knew from the very beginning that it couldn't work."

She remembered how long and fiercely Neil had struggled against her, how he had resented her influence over him, as if he felt, even then, how much misery they must endure if he allowed himself to love her. "He didn't know what was

happening to him," she reflected with a wry smile, "and when he found out he was furious with himself and me. I knew what was going on long before he did and I wasn't happy about it either. He got in my way. I had my work to do and my finals to pass; I didn't want to have to stop and think about him. I'd prided myself on keeping my emotions in good order, I didn't mean to let myself be a fool about any man just then. I could have stopped it, I suppose, even after I saw how near I'd come to loving him. There's always just that one moment, at the beginning of an affair, when you can break off if you must; but I went on. We both went on; we fell in love with each other, head over heels and after that there was no stopping it."

She recollected, with a sudden startling brightness, the time when Neil first admitted his reluctant folly. She saw the shabby old laboratory at St. Catherine's, in the gathering darkness of midwinter's afternoon, with the green-shaded lamp making pools of light here and there along the benches. All the other students had gone away to tea, but she herself had been working late, for some reason which she had now forgotten, to do with an approaching examination. She had wanted to run right through the laboratory collection of slides and she had gone on sitting there, perched up on her high stool with her legs curled under her, in her holland coat, staring down her microscope at the strings and clusters of coloured bacteria, the exquisite marbled sections of tissue. Completely absorbed in the bright illuminated field of the microscope, she had not noticed the flight of time, or the increasing darkness and quiet of the great room. She did not know that she was alone in it and returned to daily life with a start when she heard Neil come out of the inner room, where he and Professor Hodman worked together. In those days she had always been instantly aware of his presence in a room. She sat as quiet as a mouse while he walked behind her, as if he were going out of the laboratory door. Then he stopped, turned, came back and stood behind her; and she heard him say harshly, "It's time you were going."

She looked up and was astonished to find how dark the room had grown. To her dazzled eyes, tired out with long staring at bright shapes and colours, the night seemed to have come already. The five tall windows, looking north over the London roofs and chimneys, showed a sky heavy with snow cloud; there was no gleam of light in it anywhere. She shivered and found that her hands were stiff with cold; her eyes smarted and her shoulders ached with long sitting and

stooping. She rubbed her knuckles into the corners of her eyes like a child while Neil complained, "You girls never know when to stop. What's the sense in going on as late as this? You can't see what you're doing. It's almost black-out time; you ought to be at home. You've no business running about the streets after dark. We haven't had a blitz lately, but you never know when there mightn't be another. Why can't you have more sense?" She had been tired out, too tired to deal with the situation. She had simply stood there, mutely collecting her notebooks and pencils, hearing Neil's scolding voice warning her to go home quickly. It sounded as if he were telling her of some other danger which threatened herself and him. She sighed, "Yes, it's time I was going," but she did not go. She stood quite still while he came close up to her and looked at her with that long desperate stare of his, as if he dreaded all that she might do to him. He uttered her name with a deep sigh, almost like a groan. "Sophy . . ." he said and then, "I love you." Even then he did not offer to touch her, it was she who put her arms round him and kissed him. He clung to her desperately for a moment; then he thrust her away and went back quickly into his own room.

Utterly bewildered, she heard the door slam behind him, shutting him back again into his own refuge; then she heard, what his quick ears had caught sooner, the club-foot walk of the laboratory assistant, limping in to shut up the place. He was a little grizzled old man, who always muttered to himself as he went about his work and he peered at her suspiciously as he hurried from window to window, pulling down and fastening the black-out blinds, shutting out the night and the coming snow. He snapped off the green-shaded lamps on each desk as he passed it, till there were none left but hers and said to her, in that grumbling old voice of his like a creaking echo of Neil, "It's getting late. Time to shut up, miss; time to be going." He did not approve of women students. She saw the line of light round the door of the inner room; Neil had gone in there to be alone, to hide away from her and she could not follow him. She said, "All right; I'll go." and she picked up her notebooks, snapped out her light and walked to the door.

Sometimes she thought afterwards, "If that man hadn't come in just at the wrong minute I believe it would have been all right. I could have set Neil straight. I could have shown him that he didn't need to be afraid of his own feelings, I could have taught him how to be happy. Just

that little bit of bad luck put everything wrong for Neil. When the old man came in and looked at us he remembered all in a minute where we were; how he was Dr. Marriner and I was one of his students, and so we weren't supposed to behave like a couple of human beings. He got that dreadful hospital feeling of people watching you all the time, he was ashamed of having to go away and hide himself. He got me on his conscience. It does sound absurd, but I do believe it's true. The whole thing went bad on him after that. If the old fellow had just been five minutes later," she would sigh and then remind herself with a mournful smile, "Or if I'd been five minutes earlier, if I'd sneaked off a bit before time, like the rest of them, instead of stopping to finish my slides, maybe none of it would have happened at all," but down at the bottom of her heart she still felt obstinately certain that she and Neil had been destined to love one another. "It won't do," she said to herself. "There's something in Neil that I don't understand and can't manage, something that went wrong with him years ago, perhaps, when he was a child. He can't get out of the prison he's in, he daren't let himself be happy. I've done all I can, but I've got nowhere. I can't help him. I shall have to give Yeoman's up and go away. I'll write to St. Catherine's to-night and tell them I'd like that job."

She walked all the way along the corridor, between the green-tiled walls with their teasing reflections, still with her hands in her pockets, staring at the ground; she saw nothing and nobody. Two of the nurses met and passed her, going back from their dinners up to Syme, but she neither heard nor answered their polite duet of "Good-afternoon, Miss Dean." When she was out of earshot the two girls looked at one another. "Whatever was the matter with Miss Dean?" said one and the other replied, "She didn't even seem to see us, and she's generally so pleasant. Could there be something wrong, do you think? She looked most awfully queer; as if something frightful had happened and she didn't know what to do about it, poor thing!" Then they looked at their wrist-watches and ran breathless up the staircase to get to the ward on time.

CHAPTER SIX

I

DICK GROOM had had a stupid sort of morning, down in out-patients'. He took no sort of interest in ear, nose and throat cases and went through them as quickly as he could, dismissing them for the most part with the advice to come back in a week's time, and see Mr. Dyer. Nothing bored him more than having to squint down the swollen throats of fretful children with enlarged tonsils and adenoids. He rattled through the usual glib questions with his mind running on the board meeting, on Dolly Clark's sulky face and on the formal dinner-party which he had got to attend with his parents that evening, up at the Brewsters' hideous new house on Claypits Heath, in celebration of his engagement. The benches seemed extra full that morning, however, and there was a new nurse on duty who had not yet learnt the out-patient routine; Dick Groom was beginning to think hungrily of his lunch before he got to the end of Mr. Dyer's old cases.

He had just jotted down the last prescription for eardrops, dismissed the patient, lit a cigarette, and got up to go when Sister Gater put her head round the door. That austere countenance of hers became still more rigid when she saw him already on the move. "There's another case just come in, sir," said she. "Oh, Lord, I can't stick here all day," grumbled he. "It's getting on for one already. Is this something new?" She confessed that it was one of Mr. Dyer's old patients and he rightly complained, "We can't have these people dropping in whenever they feel like it. Why didn't she turn up at half-past nine with the others?" Sister Gater did her best to appease him. "Well, you know how it is, sir. The girl's had a lot of trouble with her ears before and she's been in pain all night, but she felt a bit better and went off to her work at the carpet factory this morning. Then, of course, she felt worse, and as it was Monday she thought she'd come round in her lunch hour and try and see Mr. Dyer." "Didn't you tell her he was away?" pleaded Dick, but Sister Gater merely pressed her lips together and looked vexed. She was never a very good subject for this young man's charm and she had had her

knife into him ever since she had first caught him edging up to Dolly Clark, last year, in the fracture room, when they should both have been working. So when he put his head on one side and suggested hopefully, "What about getting nurse to put on a good hot fomentation and letting the girl come back to-morrow?" she merely smoothed down her apron and replied coldly, "I think somebody ought to see her now." She did not intend to let Dick shirk the examination.

Dick gave in with what he hoped was an amiable grace, dropping down again in his swivel chair and groaning, "All right, Sister; no rest for the wicked. Send her in," but she withdrew apparently unimpressed by his appeal for pity. Dick Groom scowled at the door as she shut it behind her. His heavy handsome face looked less handsome when he was out of temper, and the patients and the junior nurses knew that better than his seniors did.

Presently the door opened again, and a young woman dawdled in, who annoyed Dick all the more by her lassitude. He said crossly, "Come along, come along"; but did not succeed in hurrying her. She seemed not to hear what he said, or indeed to see her way very clearly. She sat down clumsily in the patient's chair and turned her face blindly towards him. It was a heavy stupid dirty face, pasty and spotted, with the half-open mouth and pinched nostrils of the adenoid type and thick eyelids drooping over eyes that seemed to squint a little. She blinked at him as if she were only half-wake, and he fancied that she did not hear him very plainly, but that might have been because of the cotton-wool in her ears.

Dick Groom, very much bored with the business, fluttered through the thick wad of paper which Sister Gater had left on his desk. It was a long dog's-eared history of colds, sore throats, ear discharge and sinus trouble. "Polypi," Mr. Dyer had scrawled. "Deflected septum. Tonsils much enlarged and inflamed. Otorrhœa. Old perforation in tympanic membrane," and so on and so forth; page after page of it, illustrated with cryptic little stylised diagrams of throat and ear-drums in red and blue chalk, to the use of which he was much addicted. Apparently he had marked the girl for operation some months ago, when he could spare a bed and find her without any acute infection; meanwhile she seemed to spend her time drifting round out-patients. Dick Groom really did not see that he could do very much about her for the moment. He asked her without much interest, "What

do you complain of ? ” and after a long pause, as if it took time for the question to penetrate her mind, she mumbled, “ Me head aches, doctor.” He asked impatiently, “ Is that all ? ” and after some more thought she repeated, “ It aches bad.” She had a peculiar air of thinking over what you said and then failing to understand it ; when he commented, “ I should think you get plenty of headaches, don’t you ? ” she did not answer at all.

Dick looked at her furred tongue and her swollen red throat, pulling down the electric light over the desk to see it ; the girl blinked and screwed up her eyes as if the light hurt them. Her breath was very foul, and he asked her some perfunctory questions about her general health ; after a pause she offered, “ I was sick ‘smorning.” She shivered, as if she felt cold and he wondered if she were feverish, but no ; the nurse had taken her temperature outside, and it was only ninety-nine, when he felt her pulse it was only a slow throbbing. He gave the horrible unhealthy creature another long doubtful look and decided that she was not much more than half-witted at the best of times. “ Come, there’s not much wrong with you that I can see, he told her heartily. “ I’ll order you some salts and senna, and nurse shall put a fomentation on that ear of yours. Go home and go to bed and come back to-morrow if you’re no better ; otherwise see Mr. Dyer next Thursday.” And he made his escape, stopping as he passed Sister’s desk to remark, “ Nothing much the matter with that girl after all.” “ I’m sure I hope not, Mr. Groom,” sighed Sister Gater, looking after him with her worried air of disapproval.

2

Between twelve and one the whole hospital smelt of food, as the kitchen trolleys were run along the corridors and the jangling tin containers of food were unloaded at the doors of the wards. Inside the nurses had pulled forward the lockers and spread diet-cloths over the bed-patients. The convalescent cases gathered hopefully round the centre table, meals were the most important events in their long dull day, and they were always critical. Sister was not yet back from her morning off, and it was Nurse Clark who dished out the rabbit-stew and vegetables and the rice pudding which followed it, while the three nurses ran about with their loaded trays. Full diet, fish diet, milk diet, custards, junket, gastric feeds ; young Joan Shepherd, in Lister, was quite

confused with it all, as she scurried from bed to bed. "Don't give Pedlar that rice pudding," Betty Carter instructed her. "I told you this morning, he's one of my operation cases"; and Nurse Clark sent her to feed Robert Burgess, the burnt man in the corner, with the tart remark, "Try not to make quite such a mess of it as you did at breakfast time."

So the tall girl went down to the end bed with a feeding-cup full of custard, saying in her soft timid voice, "Please, I've brought you your dinner." The bandaged man moved restlessly and complained, "Some more of the slop they give you in here, I reckon"; then turned his head towards her, as if his muffled eyes were trying to see through the gauze and wool over them. "Are you the girl who came this morning?" he demanded. "The new one?"

She confessed, "I'm afraid I made a mess of it, I never fed anybody out of one of these things before"; and heard him utter a short amused sound, so nearly a laugh that it made her jump, coming from such a man in such a place. "All right, kid," said he, "we'll manage. I guess I know more about it than you do." He heaved himself up, leant a little forward and said in a rough kind grumbling voice, "Take it easy now; don't choke me and don't pour it down my neck either." She advanced with trembling hands, put her arm behind his pillow and held the spout to his lips. He sucked down a mouthful and shook his head for breath, and she took the cup away again. After one or two attempts the business went more easily; he was, as he had said, pretty well used to it by this time.

When he had done he sighed and lay back on his pillows. "Wipe my mouth, will you, please?" he asked, so she did that for him too. "What's your name?" he then demanded suddenly and she faltered, "Joan, Joan Shepherd," not knowing whether she was supposed to tell him. He repeated it as if the sound of it pleased him. "Joan Shepherd, I'll remember that," he assured her. "The one who laughs a lot is Nurse Carter, isn't she; and the one who drops and breaks things is Nurse Miller; and the one who bullies all you kids is Nurse Clark. I heard her telling you off this morning, didn't I?" She nodded, forgetting, that he could not see her and he continued, "I know you all by your voices. You've got a funny little way of talking yourself, as if you were too frightened to open your mouth; like a kitten that hasn't learnt how to mew." And he laughed again to himself, very softly and with great enjoyment; but at that moment Nurse Clark came up behind Joan, saying

sharply, "Now then, nurse; there isn't time for you to stand about gossiping with the patients," and the girl hurried away, all blushes.

Over in the Ferrimen Home the second relay of nurses were hurrying through their midday meal. Fried fish day it was for them, flat frilled bony slices of skate, with strong turnip greens and boiled potatoes full of eyes; and after that a heavy suet roll with an occasional currant in it. They grumbled about it as they came trooping back across the courtyard in the pale winter sunshine. The Home Sister rose from her place at the top of the table and went away; she had sat through both dinners and checked off the names in each shift. If she did not do that the younger nurses missed their meals and then went sick, making more work for every one. She went up and locked the door of the night nurses' corridor. Inside they were all going to bed, filling hot-water bottles, tying stockings over their eyes and putting cottonwool in their ears, to shut out the light and noise of the cheerful day, but it was not easy to sleep in Yeoman's in the daytime. There was too much traffic going down the Beastmarket and too many aeroplanes flying round and round from the training station at Littlefold.

The residents got their lunches how and when they could off a hot-plate in the sitting-room. Arthur Cook finished early and went up to Linacre to look over two new cases. The Czech doctor read a book in a foreign language and spoke to nobody. Dick Groom came up late from outpatient's, grumbling about Mr. Dyer's cases, swallowed his food as fast as he could and went out; he was off duty till five, and Margery Brewster and he were going to look at Dr. Painter's house together. Sophia Dean came last of all, vexed with herself for wasting so much time quarrelling with Neil Marriner. She had a long afternoon before her in the theatre and she sat down in no good humour to the end of a meat roll and the dried remains in the vegetable dishes. The telephone rang for her before she had done, and she was obliged to get up, shrug on her white coat again and go down to the casualty department to admit an accident.

Down there the morning's cases had all gone home, the dispensary shutters were closed, the benches moved over into one half of the hall; and a couple of charwomen on all fours were moving their buckets crabwise across the wet shining floor, which reflected the blue light of midday from the skylight overhead. In the casualty room Sophia found the usual group, a policeman with his helmet in his hand

Wright, the porter, in his crumpled blue uniform, tall starched Sister Gater, looking mildly distressed as usual, Nurse Capper on her knees wiping something up and a lorry driver in a brown twill overcoat, cap in hand, running his fingers through his hair. On the stretcher, under a grey blanket, was a small boy, limp and dirty, with his unconscious head lolling to one side.

"He's only just been brought in," said Sister Gater. "I found him here when I came down from dinner. I'm sorry to fetch you away from your lunch, Miss Dean; I thought, Mr. Groom was still on duty." "It's all right," said Sophia, turning up her sleeves. "Mr. Groom's just gone out, but I'd have had to come down and see the boy anyhow, if I'm to admit him before I go up to the theatre. What's he done to himself?" Sister Gater signalled with one finger to Nurse Capper, who turned back the grey blanket and loosened a bandage. Between two rough bits of wooden splinting Sophia saw fragments of bone sticking out of a torn and dirty wound in the boy's shin. "Running-down case, miss," said the policeman, clearing his throat briskly. "One of these brick-lories going to the aerodrome, all in a hurry, as usual."

The lorry-driver began excusing himself to all and sundry. "Never seen the kid at all; 'e come out of nowhere an' ran across the road. They will do it, you can't stop 'em, orter teach 'em better in school. I wasn't in no 'urry neither. I'd just come back empty for another load an' I was backin' the lorry up the corner by the canal bridge. This kid come up the steps from the tow-path, just by the lock, where the canal runs into the river, see." He turned his face this way and that as if it were important that they should all understand exactly where the thing had happened. "You got no right to back a big lorry like that," stated the policeman, "without you can see the road clear be-ind you." The lorry driver defended himself. "I got nobody to keep a look-out for me these days; my mate's been taken off the run an' the boy they give me instead, 'e's sick at 'ome with the measles. I was all on me own. A man standin' on the pavement gives me the sign to back an' I backed. The road was clear enough when I started, that I do know; but then this boy come up from the towpath, must 'a done. The first thing I knew, there was a woman on the opposite kerb screeched out an' pointed. Then she started wavin' 'er arms about; so I stopped the lorry an' got down an' there was this boy lyin' with 'is foot under the backwheel. The woman she says, 'You've killed 'im, you've killed 'im,' but 'e wasn't

too bad then, cos 'e say to me, quite plain, ' You've run over me foot, you 'ave, mister.' I says, ' Soon get you out, son ; don't you move,' an' I got back in me seat an' moved the lorry on a yard, so's we could lift 'im on to the pavement. Then you come up," said he to the policeman, " an' said, ' This boy's got to be took to the 'orspital,' you said ; an' you done up 'is leg an' we lifted 'im into the back of the lorry an' brought 'im along just as 'e was. We never waited for no ambulance nor nothin'. That's right, ain't it ? " " That's right, " said the policeman, while Sophia continued to examine the child.

He was half-conscious still, with his damp dark lashes resting on his flushed cheek, but when she pulled down his eyelid to examine the dilated pupil, he blinked and moved his head a little. She said, " He's coming round," and rested her hand for a moment on the front of the boy's jacket. When she took it away again there was a wet red stain upon it. Considerably startled, she felt quickly between jacket and jersey over the boy's heart. She brought out a limp wet black furry mass and stared at it in astonishment. Nurse Capper, fresh to the unusual incidents of casualty, squeaked, " Oh ! my goodness, what's that ? " then clapped her hands over her mouth at a distressed look from Sister Gater. The lorry driver said " Christ ! " and the policeman, mopping his brow but remaining calm, said with truth, " It's a bloody rabbit." It was indeed a very small black rabbit, newly-killed, still warm and bleeding freely. It must have been crushed to death in some way by the moving lorry-wheel.

Wright, the porter, said to nobody in particular, " That gave me a fair turn, that did," and added, " Kids will carry their pets about like that, in a jacket pocket to keep 'em warm. Mine all does it." He took the rabbit from Sophia, dangled it a moment by its hind legs and dropped it on the slab next the sink. Sophia uttered a slightly shaken laugh, then recovering herself with an effort, said, " All right, Sister, we'll take the boy in." She began to wash her blood-stained hands and over the splashing of the taps she heard Sister Gater asking, " Shall I ring up Jenner, Miss Dean ? " Jenner was the children's ward. She said first, Yes, please" ; and then corrected herself. " No, we can't send anything up to Jenner to-day. Mr. Cook thinks one of his cases may have diphtheria and he's closed the ward till he gets the swab down from the lab. Send the boy into Lister, will you ? How old is he ? " Nobody knew ; if it came to that, nobody knew who he was or where he came from.

"He's old enough for the men's surgical anyhow, Miss Dean," Sister assured her. "He doesn't come from Shaker's Row; that I do know," said the policeman, who lived there himself. "Maybe he came off one of the barges; there's two or three bin lying in the basin this week-end. I'll find out for you if I can, miss." Sophia said, "Yes, please; send his mother up as soon as you can, or somebody belonging to him. We'll have to put this leg into plaster at the end of the afternoon, when Mr. Groom's finished with the theatre; that should give them time to clean him up a bit in the ward and for you to find somebody responsible who can give consent. Let Lister know about him, will you, Sister? I've got to rush; Mr. Groom will be here before I can turn round." "If you'll just sign the admission form, Miss Dean," said Sister Gater.

Sophia finished drying her hands and sat down at the table. The policeman and the lorry driver went out arguing and Sister Gater said to Nurse Capper, mildly, "Never let me hear you make such a noise again, nurse. I don't know what Miss Dean can have thought of you." Nurse Capper defended herself feebly. "It was that rabbit, Sister. I thought . . . I don't know what I thought it was." It doesn't matter what you thought," proclaimed Sister Gater magnificently. "A good nurse never lets herself be surprised by anything." But she did not say it as unkindly as she might have done; to tell the truth she had started slightly when she saw the rabbit herself.

Sophia had finished filling up the admission form. She got up from the table saying cheerfully, "I nearly passed out myself, Sister," as she went by. Sister Gater smiled reluctantly and followed her, remarking over her shoulder, "Clear up that mess at once, nurse, before you ring through to Lister. I can't have the place looking like a fishmonger's shop." Nurse Capper was left to say forlornly to Wright the porter, "Oh! dear, now I *have* made a fool of myself. Whatever shall I do with that object?" She gazed at the corpse of the black rabbit helplessly. "You leave it to me, nurse," advised old Wright in his fatherly way. "I'll take it along to the lodge with me. It'll make my old cat a dinner. She's got kittens to feed, poor thing!"

Sophia Dean and Sister Gater crossed the out-patients' hall together. It was the dead time of the day, just slack water

between the morning and afternoon tide of out-patients and there was only one person there, a girl sitting huddled at the end of the bench, near the close dispensary shutter. Something unusual in her attitude struck Sophia, who hung on her heel a moment and asked, "What's the matter with that girl? Does she want to see any one?" Sister Gater looked round, exclaimed, "That's the case Mr. Groom saw an hour ago," and advanced towards the drowsy creature. "What are you doing here still?" she asked reproachfully. "The doctor told you to get your medicine and go home to bed."

The girl lifted up her heavy head and gaped at the two of them; then slumped down a little farther on the bench and shut her eyes. Nurse Capper emerged from the casualty room with an armful of towels. Sister Gater demanded, "Why hasn't this girl gone home?" but Nurse Capper did not know. "I thought she had, Sister," was all she could say. "She did get her medicine from the dispensary, because I saw her coming away from the window with a bottle. She was the last in the queue, and they shut down the window afterwards. She went into that lavatory over there, and I went off to lunch and didn't see her again. I suppose she's been here ever since." She was all in a fluster, not knowing her way about casualty and out-patients' yet, not knowing her own duties or whether Sister Gater was as reasonable and indulgent as she seemed.

Sophia said, "The girl looks ill," and bent over her. "What's the matter with you?" she asked putting her fingers on the girl's hot damp wrist. The girl did not reply, but a long shudder ran through her and her teeth chattered uncontrollably. She started to raise her free hand to her head; then all of a sudden groaned, turned away from Sophia and vomited, holding to the back of the bench. Sophia skipped back to save her shoes. Sister Gater exclaimed, "Oh, dear me; you mustn't make that mess here. Nurse, whatever are you doing?" Nurse Capper, in a flurry and on the wrong side of the bench, nevertheless succeeded in dumping down her armful of towels, holding the girl's head and wiping her mouth and face afterwards. "That's better," said Sister Gater. "Keep her head down"; and to Sophia, "She's one of Mr. Dyer's ear cases. She came up out of her turn this morning, and said her ear had been getting worse. I got young Mr. Groom to look at her, but he didn't think there was very much wrong with her." Sophia rubbed her nose, a trick she had when she was in doubt. "I thought at the time it was a pity Mr. Dyer wasn't here,"

confessed Sister Gater, and the two women exchanged a peculiar look ; they both of them knew quite well that Dick Groom had dismissed this case a little too easily. " She looks a lot worse now than she did then," said Sister with a harassed air. " Well, I don't know that I can do anything about it, if she's seen Mr. Groom already," said Sophia. " He might make a fuss if I interfered with one of his patients."

" She's Mr. Dyer's patient really," persisted the older woman, in her mild obstinate voice. " I can't get at Mr. Groom again ; he's off duty till five." Glancing over her shoulder with a harassed frown, she concluded, " It does look like an operation case, Miss Dean." She had been nursing for fifteen years and her manner suggested that she knew what was a serious case and what wasn't, far better than Dick Groom. So did Sophia for that matter. She did not like the look of this girl any better than Sister did. It must be tiresome, she reflected, for an old woman like Sister Gater to have to take wrong orders from a boy young enough to be her son and a fool at that. The girl glanced at the clock, with the habitual anxious look of hospital staff, who are always a little behind time. " Oh, Lord : ten to two," she groaned, " and my chief will be here any minute. All right, Sister ; if the girl's finished being sick, let's have her in the other room, on the couch, as soon as that boy's gone up to Lister."

4

Mr. Richard Groom, the honorary surgeon, got hardly any lunch at all that day. He had been out that morning to Wilchester Castle for a long and not too happy consultation with a London specialist, who advised against another operation on the Duke of Wilchester. Driving back through the bronze-dark winter woods, with their fiery carpet of beech-leaves, and across the classic spaces of the deer-park, he looked back from the top of the hill upon the square Palladian mansion, a white toy house mirrored in its ornamental water, and wondered what would become of it. The old Duke was dying in one corner of the place, while the rest of its echoing saloons and corridors were given over to the storage of manuscripts and pictures from one of the London museums and the great stables were full of troops ; under the old man's window, all day long, lorries and trucks backed and roared to shouted words of command. Fortunately he was very deaf and did not hear the noise of which his nurses

complained so bitterly. The lake was half drained, for fear that enemy aircraft might recognise its moonlit pallor; the herd of fallow deer had all been slaughtered and much of the standing timber cut down, a great part of the park itself had been ploughed and sown. The heir had been killed early in the first Libyan campaign, and his widow had already married again. Her two small daughters were in Canada still, they had been packed off to relatives of hers when the raids on London destroyed her house there. Mr. Groom, who had been brought up to think the Castle the finest house in the world, often wondered what would become of it. He supposed that the family would have to part with it after the war and he did not like to imagine it turned into a school, a hotel or a convalescent home.

He was in a bad temper when he got back to his own ugly new red house on the edge of the Claypits golf-course, overlooking the tenth green. "You're dreadfully late, Richard," complained his pretty, fretful faded wife, who was always greedy about her food. "I thought you couldn't be coming, so I went on with my lunch and sent yours down to keep warm. Ring the bell, will you, dear?" He snapped, "I don't want anything but bread and cheese and cider. I haven't time for messing about; I'm operating at the hospital at two." "There isn't a great deal of this week's cheese left," objected Mrs. Groom. "The new rations don't come till tomorrow," but he said crossly, "There's enough here for me." She was curious about his patient over at the Castle, but he would not talk about that, merely saying, "There won't be another operation. The old man's breaking up very fast." He was vexed about losing so important a patient and he munched rapidly, complaining with his mouth full about the dryness of war-time bread and the hardness of war-time cheese.

Richard Groom was often called old Mr. Groom to distinguish him from his son, especially by the younger nurses at Yeoman's; but he was in fact only in his early sixties and though a surgeon at that age, unlike a physician, is admittedly past his very best, Mr. Groom was still an extremely vigorous and irritable person. He was dark, high-coloured and quarrelsome, with a long black moustache, hairy hands and a loud and rather common voice. His father had been a much respected local veterinary surgeon, who was still living in retirement on his own small farm near Greenfold. A former generation of Wilchester people had declared, "When Groom says a cow will do, she'll do; but

when he says she'll die, die she will." The present generation maintained that Richard Groom was as good a judge of a sick man as his father had been of a sick beast. He had inherited the old man's physical strength and manual dexterity, besides complete faith in himself and a blind instinctive knowledge of how long to wait, and when to get busy, in any surgical emergency. Mr. Groom had worked in and about Wilchester all his life and had built up a sound consulting practice in general surgery; of late he had tended to specialise a little in gastric cases, but anything was fish that came to his net. Dr. Shoesmith, who disliked him intensely, declared that he had neither imagination, good manners, nor a sense of humour; but would add sarcastically, "A surgeon can get on very well without any of these things. It isn't as though he were a physician."

Mr. Groom had made a good deal of money in his time and though he was not much loved, he was greatly respected. How far the third generation of Grooms would compare with the other two remained to be seen. Richard had married a silly sentimental woman, the daughter of a former headmaster at the Grammar School, who had given him three bouncing daughters before producing the son he wanted and then lapsing into gentle fretful ill-health. The Groom girls had grown up dark and vigorous, like their father. They were all three fine tennis-players and great dancers; they never opened a book, but had plenty of practical ability. Two of them were comfortably married, the third was away on war service, driving an ambulance somewhere in the Southern Command. Dick, the youngest of the family, had been considerably spoilt by his mother and sisters, who admired him more than his father did.

Poor Mr. Groom, who had paid uncomplainingly for his son's public school, university and hospital education, was beginning to wonder what return he would get on his money. He was a tireless worker himself, who despised a lazy and careless man above all things and was rigidly intolerant of every form of self-indulgence. In the course of his long professional career he had never spared himself or learnt to spare others. He also set an extremely high value on respectability; he had been brought up in the class which thinks it all-important, and life in Wilchester had not caused him to change his opinion. He was dismayed to find that he had bred up a son who was idle, stupid and not to be trusted with women; nothing could have vexed him more.

The Grooms had been through an anxious time while

their son's engagement to Margery Brewster hung in the balance and both of them were secretly immensely relieved that the affair was finally settled. Mrs. Groom could not keep herself from saying, "You won't be too late back from hospital, I hope, dear. Remember we're going down to dinner at the Brewsters'," and though her husband snapped at her, as his custom was, "I'm not likely to forget it; you've reminded me about it three times to-day already," he was actually looking forward to this family occasion as much as his wife was. Mrs. Groom, who understood her husband perfectly and had long ceased to correct his manners, murmured cosily, "We'll get them to settle the date of the wedding to-night. I do hope Rose Brewster won't want Margery to wait till after Christmas. It isn't as though she could buy many clothes or much furniture, with all these war-time restrictions still on and nothing in the shops but utility stuff; better to wait till the war's over and get really good things. It can't be long now."

"What's the use of talking nonsense," her husband retorted, sipping his coffee and burning his tongue in his hurry. "You know perfectly well Dick's putting in for this resident job at Yeoman's. It was coming up at the board this morning, I didn't get back in time to hear what people said about it; however, Chandler will tell me. They won't be voting on it till next month. He says Shoemith and some of the others are running that Dean girl for all they're worth, but I fancy Brewster and I can turn the trick if Dick doesn't do anything stupid just now to set people's backs up. Of course if he gets it he'll have to live in for a year at Yeoman's. It's a bit of a nuisance for the boy under present circumstances, I dare say, but it can't be helped. He's got to go through with it if he wants to get on the staff later; they'd never take him without." He concluded irritably, as his wife stared at him. "I explained all that to you, months ago. Don't you ever listen to anything I say?"

Mrs. Groom took little notice of this common complaint of his. "All that was before he got engaged to Margery," said she, in her fond maternal accents. "Dick needn't apply for the post now, surely. Why, Margery would never want to wait a whole year for her wedding. That would never do."

"I don't see why she shouldn't," protested Mr. Groom. "It isn't even as though she were afraid of being called up for war-work; this job of hers at the factory is reserved, she can carry on with that, can't she? and go on living at home till Dick's free to marry and settle down." He con-

cluded, though in a somewhat doubtful voice, "Plenty of young people have to wait their chance nowadays to set up housekeeping. If he were still on active service they'd be forced to do it. After all, there's a war on": but his wife, with her exasperating feminine air of pitying his ignorance, merely repeated, "That would never do."

"Why, what are you afraid of?" demanded he irritably. "The girl won't throw him over, will she? They've known each other since they were children, and she seems to have set her heart on the boy, though what she sees in him I can't tell you. She isn't one to chop and change; she won't break it off, will she? or find somebody she likes better?" Mrs. Groom, with a little helpless flutter of her plump hands and an appealing glance out of her blue eyes, was obliged to confess, "No, but Dick might."

Husband and wife exchanged glances, and the surgeon flung himself back in his chair, exclaiming, "He'd never be such a fool, surely? He must know how lucky he is to get Margery. Of course, there was that girl at the hospital, Nurse Clark; does Margery know about her?" Mrs. Groom said firmly, "Yes, she knows; but he's told her that's all over." Mr. Groom was not satisfied. "Well, I've never been very keen on this engagement myself," said he. "It was all your idea, Mary. You would have it that the boy would settle down once he was safely married. I'm not so sure of it. I don't believe Margery knows what she's getting," and he added gloomily, "Of course I didn't want him to marry that Clark girl, but at least she would have kept him in order, from the looks of her." His wife looked shocked and maintained fondly, "Oh! once they're married Dick will make Margery very happy," but Dick's father was not so sure.

He stared gloomily at his wife as she continued, lost in her own feminine schemes. "There's that nice little house of old Dr. Painter's along Friar's Entry. Now that he's made up his mind to retire and go and live with his daughter in Hampshire, he'll want to sell his practice. It would do beautifully for the young people as long as the war lasts and I dare say we could manage to have it done up for them a little. Margery is so clever about decoration. Of course, after the war they'll have to move out into the country. There isn't any garden to speak of in Friar's Entry," Mrs. Groom pointed out, with an air of grandmotherly wisdom, "and you must have a garden where there are children."

"You're going rather fast, aren't you?" her husband

objected. "Grand children aren't by any means so certain as they used to be," but he did not shake her comfortable security. "Oh! Margery's very fond of children," said she cosily.

Mr. Groom suddenly and violently decided that he did not want to have to buy the house in Friar's Entry for his son and daughter-in-law. "I fancy Marriner's got his eye on that place of Painter's," he objected. "The man's a permanency, you know, down at Yeoman's; he's got to live somewhere. He's only in lodgings at present."

"He's a bachelor," said Mrs. Groom firmly. "It won't hurt him to live in lodgings a bit longer; he'll save more money that way. In fact, I shouldn't think he could afford to pay Dr. Painter's price yet." "And I can, I suppose," grumbled her husband. "Well," she persisted fondly, "Dick's your only son; I should think you'd want to see him happily settled in his own home." Mr. Groom sighed, for he was beginning to think that his family made altogether too many demands on him. "You all seem to think I'm made of money," he complained. "It isn't a year since Susan's wedding and that cost the earth. I'm making both those girls big allowances. Jane's the only one who's earning her keep; and this house is a constant expense. I'm always telling you we ought to cut down a bit, Mary. We've never had to do it before, but nobody knows what's going to happen to capital after this war. Not that I've been able to save as much as I'd have liked to do."

Mrs. Groom only replied inattentively, "Oh! you'll always be able to earn big fees, won't you, dear?" but he retorted, "I don't know so much about that. It strikes me there'll be no rich people left to pay them. Everybody's going to be as poor as church mice when the war's over. Besides, there's this plan of a State medical service hanging over all our heads. If that goes through there'll be nothing left but a pack of panel patients," said he, with a sudden explosive bitterness which astonished his wife. "I don't know what you're talking about, dear," she replied. "Do you never read the papers?" he demanded, but without expecting any satisfactory answer. His wife lived in a comfortable domestic world of her own. After forty years of married life it still sometimes astonished him to realise what a fool he had married. Even now she was not listening to him; with her own soft obstinacy she repeated, "It would be a pity for Dick and Margery to miss that house of Dr. Painter's. They've gone to see over it this afternoon."

At that he burst out, "The boy takes too much time off altogether. I've heard complaints already about the way he

scamps his work. Chandler told me the hospital people are all talking about it. He gave Dick a hint once himself, but the boy wouldn't take it. The next thing will be, one of the other honoraries will lodge a formal complaint about him and then it'll be good-bye to the R.S.O. job." His wife persisted, smiling, "Oh! but Dick needn't worry about that silly little affair any more. With Margery's money behind him he can afford to settle down in general practice at once, without wasting any more time on hospital work."

Mr. Groom uttered a long groan. "I've explained to you time and again," he sighed, "It isn't the job itself, it's what it leads to. Once the boy's got his foot in the door at Yeoman's he can follow on after me, with any luck, when old Taylor goes. He can gradually work himself in with the local doctors and step into my shoes when I retire. Surely you want the boy to get on, don't you?"

He received a placid smile from his wife. "Oh, Richard," said she, "it isn't any use going on making plans like that about Dick. He isn't ambitious, he doesn't want to specialise, he could never take over your work, he really isn't up to it. Haven't you found that out yet? All he and Margery care about is a nice quiet country practice, with plenty of time off for golf and the garden and their friends. She and I were talking it over only yesterday. That girl understands him better than you do."

He gazed at her in silence, feeling much as Balaam must have done when his ass opened her mouth and uttered words of wisdom. About twice a year his stupid wife would pull him up short by some such revelation of what went on in her incomprehensible mind. Within her own limits she was capable of pronouncing an astonishingly mature judgment on character and conduct. "Yes," he thought, "women only look at life in one way; all they care about is the family. A man can slave himself to death for a woman and her children, and she'll take it as all in the day's work." "Dick isn't really suited to the sort of life you've always led," the mother concluded with fond illusion. "He isn't as strong as he looks."

Her defeated husband exclaimed, in despairing disgust, "If you mean he's afraid of anything that looks like hard work, I'm with you every time. Well, have it your own way; have it your own way. I suppose I shall have to buy a practice for him, if Phil Brewster doesn't. It's too much," exploded Mr. Groom again, with the blind fury of a man who sees his pocket unfairly raided and concluded despair-

ingly, "I shall die a poor man. You'll bleed me to death among you."

"Oh! you always talk like that when your lunch hasn't agreed with you," Mrs. Groom retorted carelessly. "You're working much harder than you need, dear; I've told you so time and again. You drive all over the county; you let people get you out of bed in the middle of the night, when they could perfectly well have let you know you were wanted in the daytime. On top of that they fetch you down to Yeoman's every day of the week. If it isn't operations or out-patients it's somebody taken worse in one of the wards; and if your own patients are all doing nicely then it seems to me they call you in to look at somebody else's case. Nobody pays you a penny for all the work you do at Yeoman's and all the time you spend there. You give it free. I never have thought that fair. Why, even the young house physicians and house surgeons get something for their trouble."

Mr. Groom gazed at her in despair. He had long ceased to try and explain the voluntary hospital system to her. He could not get her to see that the small old-fashioned second-rate hospital was the place where he had learnt how to practice his profession, the workshop in which he had turned himself from a raw newly qualified student into an experienced surgeon, the place where he had taught himself skill and judgment. He often grumbled about the long hot hours which he was forced to spend for nothing in the wards and theatre at Yeoman's, but he knew well enough how valuable they had been to him. He could not have put into words, even to himself, the feeling which he had about the place, a shamefaced mixture of pride, gratitude and affectionate exasperation; the closest that he could have got to it was that Yeoman's was like another wife to him. Besides, he was a little king there and knew it; so that when Mrs. Groom suggested in her doting voice, "Don't you think it's about time you retired from the hospital, dear?" he exclaimed with a violence which astonished even himself, "Retire? from Yeoman's. Good God! I wouldn't dream of it." The stare of her round foolish blue eyes vexed him as it had never done before; he glanced at his watch, jumped to his feet exclaiming, "All this nonsense will make me late for the theatre," and bolted from the room. Mrs. Groom sighed. "Dear me! why *will* men get so excited?" stretched out her hand and ate another biscuit thoughtfully. "I'll wear my new black velvet to-night," she decided at leisure.

"It isn't quite new, of course, but Rose Brewster hasn't seen it and it does suit me. Nowadays we don't often get a party."

5

Driving down to the hospital, behind his old chauffeur in the big car, Mr. Groom was in a simmering temper all the way. He never drove himself nowadays if he could help it, because he needed to keep his hands steady when he was going to operate and usually he tried to rest and relax a little, according to a technique which he had long practised. Even on these short journeys it helped him, but this afternoon his muscles were all tightly stretched, and his nerves felt like overstrung wires. He was twitching all over with irritability. This mood had become too frequent with him lately. He could put it down to war strain and diet, to overwork, to domestic and professional anxieties, to a gouty liver or to hardening arteries, as he chose; but the fact remained that he could no longer trust his own self-control. He had never been a patient man, but he had managed, on the whole, to harness his energies to the demands of his exacting profession. It was only during the war years that his temper had finally become so violent and uncertain that it was now a hindrance to him in his daily work. He could not bear to be crossed or hindered, he no longer found it stimulating to work against time, his decisions were not quite as swift and unhesitating as they used to be, the fine edge of his technique had become just a little blunted.

He took no pleasure this afternoon in the sight of his native town. The fog had all blown away and the houses of Wilchester glowed brown and russet in the winter sunshine, the smoke from its chimneys went straight up into the blue sky. The pavements looked as clean as if they had been washed and the tall tower of St. Blazey's lifted up its rich decoration of crockets and pinnacles proudly over the huddle of tiled roofs. The air smelt cheerfully of frost and bonfires, but Mr. Groom sat with his eyes shut and did not look about him. The car ran swiftly, too swiftly for him, down Claypits Hill, over the swollen brown river by the Abbot's Bridge, up Chepe Street, across the crowded Beastmarket, between the stalls and the pens of lowing cattle and turned into the courtyard of Yeoman's. It drew up at the steps of the main entrance just as the clock struck two.

Sergeant Forester came down the steps and opened the door with the military flourish which he reserved for the

honorary staff. He was always particularly attentive to Mr. Groom and he usually got an affable, if hurried nod from him ; but to-day the great man got himself awkwardly out of the car and marched up the steps with his stiff-jointed gait, looking neither to the right nor to the left. When he had disappeared inside the building Sergeant Forester and the chauffeur exchanged a knowing glance. " One of our bad days," remarked the Sergeant and Mr. Groom's chauffeur agreed. " It's the east wind," he declared wisely. " We generally get a touch of lumbago when the wind's in that quarter." " Somebody'll catch it up in the theatre," opined sergeant Forester, who heard the theatre gossip from the instrument man. " When he's got his lumbago, Mason says, you can't do a thing right for him." He followed the Honorary Surgeon up the steps and the chauffeur parked the car across the courtyard, under the leafless lime-trees. He unfolded a newspaper, refolded it into a six-inch square and settled down to read it through, paying particular attention to the news from Italy, since he had a son serving with the Eighth Army. " One thing about these petrol regulations," he said to himself, " I don't have to take Her shopping."

Mr. Groom glared about him as he entered the main hall, expecting to encounter the neat white-coated figure of his house surgeon ; it was one more annoyance, in an intensely annoying day, when he was already behind time himself, that she should not be ready for him. Even after he had hung up his hat and coat in the staff room and emerged again, she was not there, and he had to wait for quite two minutes in a patch of afternoon sun on the black and white marble flooring, glaring about him, before he saw the girl coming towards him down the long passage from the out-patient and casualty departments. She walked fast, but she was not in the least flurried, even when he cocked his eye at the clock on the staircase and told her in the rough voice which terrified the younger nurses, " You're late, Miss Dean." She replied quite calmly, " I'm sorry, Mr. Groom, they fetched me down to look at an emergency in out-patients"; and as he fidgeted, " It's time we were in the theatre," continued almost as if he had not spoken, " I told them to keep the case for you, I thought it would be less trouble for you to see her there before we go upstairs." Really, he thought, the girl was a bit too cool. A punctual man himself, he hated being delayed and he said crossly, " I never like to keep the theatre waiting. What sort of a case is it? Can't it go up to the wards till we've finished operating?" There were

after all, his manner said, few emergencies which could not and did not wait a couple of hours for the surgeon to deal with them.

Sophia told him calmly, "It's a cerebral abscess." He looked at her very sharply, but she did not waver; pursing his lips to a soundless whistle he then said, crossly, "I'm sure I hope you're wrong." She answered, "I wish I were, but I don't see what else it can be," and with a vexed shrug of his shoulders he fell into step beside her. He knew her well enough by this time to admit that she would not disorganise his afternoon for nothing, but he was extremely annoyed, for he did not like that kind of case. It seldom came his way and he was none too sure of being able to deal with it properly. "Dyer's away, of course," said he as they went down the corridor to out-patients'. "Yes, worse luck; it would come up when he's on holiday."

Sister Gater led them into the cubicle where the patient lay on the black leather couch, a spotty dough-faced girl, snoring through her pinched nostrils, with her mouth sagging open; but though she was in a stupor she was not quite unconscious, for she moved her head fretfully from side to side when he touched her wrist. "Well, what's the history?" said he impatiently and was instructed by Sophia about the professional details of the case, as set out in Mr. Dyer's tattered bundle of papers. He held them in his hand, but did not pay much attention to them, preferring the clear picture which she set out for him. "Yes," said he, nodding as he checked off her points. "Drowsiness, headache, vomiting, slow pulse and low temperature, rising suddenly; and you say the old ear-discharge has stopped. It's tiresome; these chronic ear-cases are the very devil. I hate 'em. What's the temperature gone up to now?" Sophia mutely showed him the thermometer which Nurse Capper had just taken from the girl's mouth; it had risen sharply by a couple of degrees since the morning and the pulse was running fast now under the surgeon's fingers. "Not so good," said he and lifted the girl's dirty hair to feel behind her ear, but found no swelling there; the trouble by this time was much deeper.

He raised one eyelid, then the other. Sophia mutely offered him what she had in her pocket, an ophthalmoscope with an electric light in the handle, a pretty German toy and the pride of her heart. The surgeon took it with a grunt of disapproval, growling, "These things are no use to me"; but peered nevertheless first into one dilated pupil and then

into the other. The girl groaned and tried to avoid the light. At a glance from Sister, Nurse Capper steadied her head on the mackintosh pillow. Mr. Groom said "Yes, yes," straightened his back from stopping and grunted again as his lumbago caught him, "I'm afraid you've got it right this time. She'll have to come in for a decompression; send her up to Syme and tell the theatre people to put her down for the end of the list, after the clean cases. It's a nice business to run up against a thing like this when Dyer's away."

He gave a long heavy sigh of which he was probably quite unconscious; it seemed to him that the world was out of joint this afternoon. "I don't like these emergencies put down in a hurry," he complained irritably. "They're never properly prepared and it gives trouble in the theatre. If only the girl had come along earlier in the day, something could have been done about it. When did you see her first?" He glared at Sophia, beginning to find something disconcerting about this most unwelcome case. Sophia told him, "About half an hour ago sir," but something in her voice and look were unsatisfactory. His inelastic mind did not take in an explanation as quickly as it used to do. He rapped out, "Somebody talked about her temperature having been sub-normal this morning." "It was when Mr. Richard Groom saw her," replied Sister Gater, eyeing him steadily and she continued, as he glared at her, "The girl came up about half-past twelve and wanted to see Mr. Dyer. I told her he was on holiday. Mr. Richard had just finished seeing out-patients, but the girl looked so ill that I persuaded him to have a look at her." "Well," demanded Mr. Groom, irritably, "why has she been kept hanging about all this time? Why didn't you get her into the ward?" Sister Gater told him deliberately, "Mr. Richard didn't think there was anything much wrong with her. He told her to go home."

Mr. Groom felt as if something had struck him a heavy blow over the heart. That Madonna face of Sister Gater's with its bands of shining hair, its faint expression of spiteful satisfaction, swam for a moment before his eyes. He picked up the case-papers and turned them over to have some employment for his hands. At first he could not see them properly, then his eyes cleared and he saw his son's prescription and initials carelessly scribbled on the last page, under the date stamp. He raised his eyes from that betrayal to find all three women watching him. Sister Gater had a

spark of triumph in her pale eyes, the little nurse looked frightened but agog with curiosity; Sophia's brilliant gaze was charged with understanding and pity. That vexed him as nothing else could have done. She should not presume to be sorry for him. He glared at the clock, flung down the papers and exclaimed, "Well, get on, get on; we're a quarter of an hour late as it is." And off he marched, leaving Sophia to follow.

6

Going back along the echoing corridor, between the green-tiled walls with their teasing reflections, Sophia stole a glance at her chief and saw him frowning heavily. Perhaps it was the underwater light of the place which made him look so white and old. She had never liked the man, but she did feel sorry for him. She could not mistake his stricken harassed air. He had received a shock from which he would not immediately recover. All of a sudden she saw Mr. Groom toss his heavy head like an old horse plagued with flies. He turned on her fiercely. "How came you to see that young woman?" he demanded. "Mr. Dyer's patients are none of your business, you know."

She had expected this and patiently set out her story, speaking slowly because she knew that he would want time to take it in. "When the casualty people came back from lunch they found the girl hadn't gone home after all. I suppose she'd been sitting down in some corner out of sight. Sister Gater didn't like the look of her, she seemed to have got so much worse since the morning. I was down in casualty, admitting an accident case and Sister asked me to examine her." His frown did not relax as he muttered, "Yes, these old sisters; they know a bad case when they see one." It was just what his own incurably idle and careless boy had not done; trying to scamp his work and cut corners, he had fallen headlong into one of the oldest professional traps. Sister Gater and Sophia Dean had pulled him out of it between them, but the girl knew well enough that his father would have preferred any one but herself to discover the mistake; all of a sudden she got the full glare of those harassed dark eyes as Richard Groom instructed her sharply, "This mustn't go any further."

The girl's nostrils dilated, and she lifted up her head like a deer. "I shan't talk about it," said she disdainfully. Mr. Groom's eyelids flickered and he moved his hand. "I don't

mean you," he muttered in grudging apology, and as she still struggled to hide her vexation continued reluctantly, "You're not a talker, I will say that for you; but in a place like this everybody talks. It wouldn't do if this got known outside." He gave Sophia a long hard stare, but she remained silent; to tell the truth, she thought young Dick had done for himself this time. Sister Gater, who had her knife into him already, would drop a hint where it would do most good; she fancied that the story would be all round the hospital in no time. There were plenty of people who would be glad to get hold of something against Dick Groom; he had made enough enemies, in his idle careless fashion, to queer his own pitch. She saw that his father knew it from the way he went on muttering to himself. They reached the lift and she pressed the button to bring the old-fashioned affair down from the top floor. As it came groaning and creaking down to ground-floor level she heard him grumble, "I'm not satisfied with the way that girl's been treated. There might be a pack of trouble if some people in the town got hold of it. Here she's been badgered about from one person to another, kept sitting in a draught in out-patients', looked over in a hurry, given a bottle of ear-drops and some medicine and packed off home; when all the time she was a surgical emergency. It wouldn't do this place any good at all if that got into the papers; no, it wouldn't do us any good." For the moment he had lost sight of his son's danger in his anxiety for the reputation of Yeoman's, and Sophia liked him all the better for that. His broken mutterings came to an end and he gave her the strangest look of shame, appeal and confusion. "The boy shouldn't have missed it," he said to her.

Much as she had always disliked the big sullen-tempered man, Sophia was moved by his distress. She began hurriedly, "I don't suppose the signs were anything like so clear when your son saw the girl at half-past twelve. She must have seemed just deaf and stupid then; obviously she got much worse afterwards. I fancy the abscess has burst into the ventricle within the last hour." He said, "Maybe; that's what it looks like." She went on against her better judgment, "Anybody might have missed it, sir"; but Mr. Groom retorted, "You didn't miss it yourself," and to that she had no more to say. The lift came into sight and clanked down to a stop behind its iron gates. As it rattled to rest she thought she heard Dick Groom's father say, "He could have seen it if he'd looked at the girl properly. It was carelessness,

gross carelessness ; that's what I can't forgive." She did not suppose that he knew he was speaking aloud. He had lately developed a trick of talking to himself ; it was notoriously because he was growing just a little hard of hearing, though he never admitted it. She put her hand on the latch of the gates and opened them for him. Through the clash and rattle she thought that she heard him say, " It isn't the first time he's let this place down," but she could not be sure of it. He marched into the lift and Sophia followed him politely ; she shut the gates and pressed the button and they were carried in silence up to the theatre.

7

Back in the casualty department Nurse Capper was trying to get through on the hospital telephone to Syme, the women's surgical ward. After some buzzing and crackling, she heard the voice of her particular friend Porter, the second year nurse. Cocking a wary eye at Sister Gater, who appeared to be out of earshot, she murmured mockingly, " That you, Porter ? A bit more work for you, dearie ; there's an emergency just coming up. Mr. Groom's taking it at the end of his list ; it's a cerebral abscess. Now isn't that nice for you ? " Nurse Porter's far-away voice replied, " Blast the man ; that means another lousy head to shave. I've done one this week already, and if there is a job I hate, that's it. All right ; I'll tell Sister, hurry it along, will you ? How are you getting on down there ? " " I'm dead to the world," proclaimed Nurse Capper, " but we do see life. We've just had a lovely little bit of business, dearie. Remind me to tell you about it this evening ; here comes Sister." And she replaced the receiver, smoothed down her apron, and reported to Sister Gater in a voice as meek as a lamb's bleat, " Syme are getting a bed ready for that case." " Then tell Wright to bring in the stretcher and take her up," Sister Gater said anxiously. " They won't have too much time as it is to get her ready for the theatre." She looked worried, as well she might, but she was not the sort, Nurse Capper recognised thankfully, to take out her feelings on other people. " Be as quick as you can," was all she said. " I shall want you for some fomentations and dressings presently."

CHAPTER SEVEN

I

MISS BARBER, the Matron of Yeoman's, took her meals by herself as the captain of a ship must do ; she ate from a tray in her own floriferous sitting-room, where the curtains and covers, rioting all over with hollyhocks and prize delphiniums, made a singularly inappropriate background for her austere figure. She allowed half an hour for her lunch, meanwhile giving an allotted quantity of attention to the war news in her morning paper. To-day the headlines were distinctly exciting, but they did not delay her beyond her appointed time. At half-past one precisely she went into the outer office, sat down behind her official desk under the portrait of Miss Alethea Ferriman and struck the bell at her right hand.

Half-past one was the time at which she interviewed such members of the nursing staff as needed her personal attention. She did not trouble herself much with the movements of the first and second year nurses, who were changed about from ward to ward every three months in a set routine, until they had made the round of the hospital. Once engaged they came under her immediate eye only when they fell sick, or misbehaved themselves ; but it was her practice to interview the senior nurses when they changed their posts, which happened every six months. This afternoon, as it chanced, there were four of them sitting demurely in a row in the outer office, all young women who had lately finished their training and passed their State examination. Two of them the efficient Miss Barber hoped to keep on at Yeoman's, the third was leaving in any case and the fourth she intended to dismiss. Half an hour should finish the lot of them and set her free to perform her weekly inspection of the laundry.

The first girl did not detain her long. She was the staff-nurse from Chamberlayne, the maternity ward, who was leaving to take up district nursing. She only needed a few good wishes, a promised testimonial, a handshake and a toothy smile. After her came the staff-nurse from Jenner, the children's surgical ward, a pale red-haired creature with a delicate drooping air, who was going over to Chamberlayne to study for her C.M.B. She got a short lecture on a nurse's

first duty, which was, declared Miss Barber, that of preserving her own health. Matron knew all that there was to be known about the tiresome disabilities of nurses; how they persisted in getting sore throats, boils and septic fingers from infected dressings, flat feet and varicose veins from long standing, strained hearts from too much lifting and occasionally tuberculosis. This red-haired girl had a poor record in the matter of sore throats and swollen glands, and last year Mr. Groom had had to open a septic finger for her, which had kept her off duty for quite three weeks. "You must take special care about gargling night and morning while you're in Chamberlayne, nurse," Matron told her severely. "It would never do to have one of your septic throats while you're in that particular ward."

On the third arrival, Nurse Gow from Sydenham, Matron spent a little more of her time and her synthetic affability. She was particularly anxious to keep the Scots girl, a plain, sensible and efficient young woman with no nonsense about her, who apparently never gave a thought to men. Nurse Gow was a trifle more independent perhaps than Matron altogether liked, but she knew her work thoroughly and she was not one to make any trouble for her superiors. It was therefore with a certain hesitation that Matron began, "Nurse, I shall want you to take charge of Jenner Ward for a month while Sister goes on holiday."

Nurse Gow put on a somewhat dour look, but said nothing. She was known to prefer medical nursing, and it was said that she had been considering leaving Wilchester to take a post elsewhere. Sister Priest had even hinted to Matron that she knew where Nurse Gow thought of going. Matron thought it best to continue, as one woman to another, "Of course I should prefer to keep you on the medical side, but at the moment there's no post vacant. It won't hurt you to get a little more surgical experience and I've noticed that you're very fond of children."

Nurse Gow admitted, "I am that," in her cautious Scots voice, but her face did not brighten; indeed it grew even more gloomy when Matron continued artfully, "I shall need a Night Sister when Sister Mercer comes off next month." "I'm not just certain that I care about night-duty, Matron," objected Nurse Gow. "I don't sleep all that well in the daytime." Clearly she was in two minds about staying. Matron decided to put her cards on the table. "Quite between ourselves, nurse," said she, leaning her tight blue alpaca-bosom a little forward across the desk, "I expect Sister Priest

to resign her post next year. She should have left us two years ago when she reached our age-limit, but we asked her to stay on because of war-conditions. I hardly think we shall need her for another year." The two women exchanged looks of perfect understanding on this point and Matron said, playing with her pen, "We shall be wanting a Sister for Sydenham Ward when she goes. If you were still with us I should be glad to put your name forward for the post." Nurse Gow, looking more Scots than ever, replied after a pause, "I'll not deny that would suit me very well, Matron," and smoothed down her immaculate apron. "Then you'll report to Jenner next Monday," said Matron briskly, making an entry on the great chart which was spread out before her on the desk. Nurse Gow pronounced a formal "Very well, Matron," and withdrew, looking pleased with herself, while Miss Barber permitted herself the comfortable reflection that the interview had passed off exactly as she wished.

Last came in Dolly Clark, looking vividly handsome, brisk and out of temper, as she snapped the door to behind her and marched up to the desk. Miss Barber gave the girl a deliberately thoughtful stare and kept her waiting a full half-minute as she checked the chart, turned another page of her own private report book, corrected an entry and laid it down; then she said, in her cold voice, "To-morrow, nurse, I shall be taking you off the surgical side and sending you as staff-nurse to Sydenham for six months."

Dolly Clark's high colour deepened as she received this order. She appeared to be struggling with herself and trying to keep quiet, but in the end she said in a strangled voice, "I put in for the post of Theatre Sister, Matron." Miss Barber ticked off another entry in her book on the page marked Dorothy Mary Clark; then replied, with an uninterested air, "That matter was fully discussed at the board this morning. It was decided to advertise the post. Sister Mercer will take over the theatre for a few weeks, when Sister Harbinger leaves, until we can find a suitable candidate." She had intended to say more, but she paused because the girl had exclaimed fiercely, "Then I'm to be passed over."

Miss Barber gave her the full stare of her cold and dominant blue eye. She merely said, "Nurse Clark," but in a tone of such surprised severity that it checked Dolly, who stood sullen and shaking, her breast heaving, her colour uncertain. She twisted her fingers together in a vain attempt to control her resentment, but she did not dare to open her

mouth. "Your name was brought forward," the Matron told her, watching those restless hands, "by Miss Farmer, I think; but I felt obliged to tell the committee that I could scarcely recommend you." And she concluded, as she had done in the board room, "Your ward-work is satisfactory enough, but I hardly think you have enough sense of responsibility yet for the post of Theatre Sister." Dolly Clark became aware too late that her unsteady hands had betrayed her. She put them behind her like a schoolgirl and stood to attention; then she said, in a choked and expressionless voice, "I had better give in my notice."

Matron raised her eyebrows, but said nothing; it suited her very well that Dolly should dismiss herself, it would save trouble and questions, the board did not like it when a nurse was sent away for no reason that could be put down on paper. "I won't be pushed off to the medical side," Dolly burst out. "Surgical experience is what I want, if I can't get it here I'll go somewhere else. I'll take a Service job, I'll go overseas." Matron raised her voice ever slightly, just so that the cold edge of it should penetrate the girl's hearing. "I am not interested in your future plans, nurse," said she. "You have finished your training, you are only here on a temporary footing. I will accept your notice and you can leave at the end of the month." She wrote a final entry in the report-book and drew a firm line across the page at the bottom of Dolly's record; without lifting her eyes she said, "That will do, nurse." She did not look up again until the door had closed sharply behind the girl. Then she allowed a breath of relief to escape her, she had got rid of Dolly very comfortably after all. The hands of the clock pointed to two; she locked the report book away in the top drawer of her desk, closed her pen and stuck it in her breast pocket, got up and went down to inspect the laundry.

2

When Sister Abbot came back on duty after her own dinner at half-past one she could tell at once, from the feel of the ward, that Nurse Clark had been bullying the younger nurses all morning. It was plain to her experienced old eyes from the whisk of Betty Carter's apron as she flounced round the door, from Miller's red and swollen eyelids and the new child's shocked distressed silence; her very movements had grown clumsier and slower since the morning, as if she were no longer sure of doing anything right. Sister Abbot shook

her grey head in a displeased fashion once or twice as she bustled round the operation cases. The old woman took a singularly tolerant view of anything that a handsome girl like Dolly Clark might choose to do in her off-time, but she would not permit anything to upset the comfort of the ward, and if the staff-nurse's temper did that, she would be better gone.

Sister Abbot took particular pains to teach her new probationer the little drill of filling and cleaning the hypodermic syringes, as the leggy child jingled the trolley after her from one bed to another. There were three cases that afternoon, a hernia, an appendix and Pedlar, the man in the corner, vaguely put down as a laparotomy. ("They'll take him first," Betty Carter had told young Joan, "because Mr. Groom doesn't know how much he'll have to do to him," and when asked what the long word meant had said brightly, "It means he doesn't know what's the matter with him.") At each bed Sister Abbot produced her accustomed formula, "Now here's something to make you feel comfortable; just pull up your sleeve." She dabbed on the spirit, filled the hypodermic syringe, held it to the light and ran the bubble up to the point of the needle; then pinched up the skin and plunged the needle home, all in one movement so swift and practised that the first performance of it was over before the child had taken it in. At the second and third beds she recollected herself and did it slowly for her benefit. "Now I want all three needles carefully cleaned, nurse," said she. "Rinse them through with cold water and methylated spirit and then put them back in the methylated tray and bring me a pair of operation socks for Pedlar. They're on the third shelf in the linen cupboard, at the back."

She went back by the end of the corner bed and spoke to Burgess, the man with the bandaged face; then Pedlar, in the bed opposite, asked her anxiously, "That clock's fast, isn't it, Sister?" She did not tell him that it was keeping perfect time, but replied soothingly, "I must speak to the engineer about it." She knew that whatever time the hands showed, they must be moving too fast for him. "Will they keep me up there long?" he asked, in a voice which begged her to stay by him for a little. She replied cheerfully, "Mr. Groom never takes long over his cases. You'll be back in the ward by tea-time." This homely thought soothed him a little, as she had known it would, but he still kept on watching the clock. He was a wasted man with a ragged greying

moustache, and the bones of his face stood out sharply under his weathered brown skin. His foot jumped suddenly under the coverlet and he gripped one bony hand with the other; she knew that his flesh was crawling with apprehension and that he could scarcely keep himself still. He would feel better once the narcotic had begun to work on him; meanwhile he licked his dry lips and swallowed with difficulty. "Would you like a drink of lemonade?" she asked him and when he nodded signalled to the young nurse, who was just coming back with the hypodermic tray. She fetched a glass from the table and Sister Abbot held it to the man's lips. He drank thirstily and she heard his teeth chatter against the glass. As he leant back against the pillow he sighed plaintively, "I thought the missus would have been here by now. You did promise she should come."

"She'll be here to see you to-night when you wake up again," Sister Abbot told him, turning back the foot of the bedclothes. Taking the thick white knitted bed socks from Joan Shepherd, she began to put one on and told the child to do the other. "It's a long way in from Ramscote and there wasn't a bus to-day; Miss Brewster had to arrange for a W.V.S. car to bring Mrs. Pedlar in with one of the out-patient cases." She saw Joan's hands stop a moment, as she heard the name of his village and put two recollections together out of her crowded busy memory. "Nurse comes from your part of the country," said she, to distract the man and to cheer the homesick child. "She lives up on the wold, on the other side of Little Tithing."

The old Sister herself was a native of those parts; when she was living as a girl on White Sheet Hill, she had often been to Little Tithing, where the Roman villa was and to Ramscote with its great tithe barn, propped on stone pillars from a Roman temple. Both villages lay on the first slope of the wold, up near the source of the Dodder. "That's right, isn't it, nurse?" she said and Joan Shepherd, pulling the knitted stocking up above the man's bony knee, replied in her soft surprised voice, "Yes, I come from up above Middle Barton, from Cherry Tree Farm."

It caught the man's attention successfully. His roving eyes forgot the clock's inexorable progress and returned to fix themselves upon the girl's young and charming features. "Cherry Tree, indeed," said he. "That's a place I once knew well. Be you Farmer Shepherd's daughter?" and when she nodded eagerly, went on, "Why, I had ten years at Winterbourne End, next farm to Cherry Tree; I was

shepherd there to Mr. Packer, that's dead now. A good master he was too. That was when I was only a young man, years ago ; before you was born, I reckon, before your father come to Cherry Tree. 'Tis very light land up at Winterbourne, good for nought but sheep. At Cherry Tree, now, you've good corn land and water-meadows along with it." "Yes, indeed," the young nurse replied eagerly, forgetting her work and resting her hand on the locker. "Father always likes to drown the water-meadows in spring and get the sheep down from the hill after." Sister Abbot walked away and left them to it. The clock had only a minute or two to go ; it did not matter that the child should waste that much time, if it was any comfort to Pedlar to hear her talking. She thought herself that the man had cancer of the stomach and that Mr. Groom had left his operation too late. As she sat down at the table, with her back to them, to look over some diet-sheets she heard the man complain, "I'd like to be back at Ramscote now ; that I would" ; and the girl's fresh country voice replied, "You'll be back by lambing-time, shepherd, never fear." He sighed, "Sister tells me that, but I don't know ; I don't know. I've been sick a tidy while now, or so it seems to me. I never was one for laying long abed. All my life I've liked to be out and about, in the worst of the weather. Sometimes I think I'll never see another lambing time."

The drug was beginning to take hold of him by this time and his voice grew drowsy. "I've fell away something terrible since I come in," he sighed. "I've got no appetite and I don't relish the food they give you in this place, all slops and gruel. If I was home at Ramscote and could get out and about I'd soon put on flesh again. Laying in bed makes me feel sick ; yes, and be sick too, and then me stummick hurts me afterwards. I feel as if I'd got something weighing me down ; just here," said he, putting his bony hand on his body. "They say they can take it away, but I don't know . . . I don't know. I wish I was back at home, that I do." His voice faded away and his eyelids drooped ; his head slipped a little sideways on his pillow. Sister Abbot looked over her shoulder as the ward doors swung wide and the theatre orderly came in, just on the stroke of two, dressed all in white and pushing his trolley before him, Nurse Carter came out of the sluice, putting on her cuffs. and Sister Abbot rose to her feet ; the three of them converged upon Pedlar's bed. "Now, nurse," said Sister Abbot to the new girl, who stood bewildered, "Just turn

down the bedclothes, will you?" The shepherd from Ramscoate no longer knew what was happening to him; unresisting, he let himself be lifted on to the trolley and rolled in blankets.

Nurse Miller came up, staring and clutching at her cap as her manner was. "Sister, they've just rung through from casualty to say there's an accident case coming in." "What sort of a case?" demanded Sister Abbot, but Nurse Miller could not tell her. "I suppose they've got a new nurse down there this morning who doesn't know the ropes," recollected Sister; "but if they don't tell you what the case is you should remember to ask them. Go back and do it now." She sighed, for she had instructed Nurse Miller on this point before, but the girl seemed incapable of taking anything in. Long years of experience had taught Sister Abbot to distinguish good material from bad with immediate certainty. Miller was the wrong sort altogether, she got flustered at the least hint of criticism, the smallest change in her orders; she would never make a nurse. This new child was different, she had not found her feet yet, and Nurse Clark had been harrying her, but she would soon take hold. Sister Abbot hastened to employ her. "Make up the bed again, nurse," said she briskly. "There's nothing makes a ward look so bad as an unmade bed. Do you know how to make up a bed for an operation case?" and when the tall child nodded eagerly, said, "All right, then, get on with it," and turned her back to follow the theatre case. At the door of the ward she met Nurse Miller, looking wilder than ever. "It's a boy with a compound fracture of the tibia, Sister," she reported, "and he's to go up to the theatre for a plaster at the end of the afternoon." "Then get Number Ten ready for him," directed Sister Abbot. "Nurse Shepherd will help you, show her how to make up a bed for an accident case, if she doesn't know." She told Betty Carter to pass the message on to the theatre people and watched the doors open and the trolley go out, with Mason pushing the head and Betty Carter the foot of it.

3

When she turned round young Dr. Marriner was at her elbow. He must just have come in, moving quickly and silently as his manner was. He held out a paper to her, saying something about leaving it as he went by and that he was afraid it was late. "Mr. Groom wanted it before,

but it got mislaid somehow. I'm sorry about it, Sister." She took the paper from him, saying briskly, "I'll see he gets it," but her motherly eyes were on his face. She had never seen the young man look so strange and pale. "What's the matter with you, Dr. Marriner?" she demanded, seeing him lean against the doorpost.

He looked at her vaguely; then he murmured, "Perhaps I could . . . sit down . . ." She put her strong right arm under his and guided him to the armchair in the office; as he dropped into it she heard him stifle a sick groan. She stood over him, watching him anxiously. "You do look bad," she told him. "Would you like a dose of brandy?" She took her bunch of keys out of her apron pocket as she spoke, he really did look so very grey, but he only shook his head and moved his hand in denial, while he muttered with a shiver, "Couldn't keep it down."

Sister Abbot bit the back of her middle finger, as her habit was when she felt perplexed; then she had an idea and turned back into the ward. Neil Marriner sitting with his head on his hand, and his elbow on his knee, thinking how much he disliked the pattern of the official carpet, heard her call, "Nurse Shepherd, I want you." He had a moment's glimpse of a tall leggy girl hurrying up to the ward door. Then the world became uninteresting to him for a little, while he struggled with his uncontrollable nausea and the pain under his ribs.

When he recovered Sister Abbot was holding a glass to his mouth. There was a thick soothing brew in it, hot, yellow and sweet. He sipped it reluctantly, not expecting it to stay down, but it spread warmth and comfort over the raw burning circle of his ulcer, and he drank a little more of it. The old woman stood and watched him with her arms folded. She did not speak until he had drained the glass and set it down on her table, all among the official lists and certificates. Then he looked gratefully up at her and told her accusingly, "There was an egg in that, Sister; you must have stolen it from one of the patients."

"It's only one of Number Fifteen's," she excused herself. "His mother keeps a poultry farm and she brings him more than Mr. Groom will let him eat. You want it more than he does. Did you have any lunch to-day, I wonder?"

The pale young man shook his head impatiently, while she continued to scold him, as she had often done before, for he was one of her favourites. "Really, you haven't a bit of sense, Dr. Marriner. Four days out of five you don't come

down to your lunch ; you just sit up there eating your nasty fish paste sandwiches with one hand and writing notes with the other ; it's downright stupid, that it is. I know all about that duodenal ulcer of yours ; Mr. Groom says you'll never be right without an operation. You'll end up as an emergency one of these days, that's what you'll do ; making trouble for all of us, if you don't take more care of yourself. What you want is a good rest." She shook her grey head at him sternly.

"Everybody tells me that to-day," he complained, yawning and smiling feebly. Her drink of raw egg and sugared milk had evidently given him some relief from his pain. "What I really want is somebody like you to look after me." He leant his head on his hand again and his eyelids drooped a little, while she studied him with disapproval. "I'd like to have you in my ward for a fortnight," she told him truthfully, "lying in bed drinking egg and milk every four hours and not raising your head from your pillow. That might do you some good. You'll never get better living as you do." He murmured "Heavenly . . ." with another sick sighing yawn ; then glanced guiltily at the clock and tried to sit up. "Now don't you move for ten minutes," Sister Abbot commanded him instantly. "Let that egg settle on your stomach before you go rushing back to work. You've no more sense than a baby, Dr. Marriner. Just you stay where you are, nobody's going to disturb you. I've Mr. Groom's theatre cases to see to," and out she marched, leaving the young man sitting in her chair, with his head on his hand.

4

Out in the ward she had a look round with her experienced old eyes and saw that the two girls had not done badly with their bedmaking. They had finished the operation bed ; there were clean sheets on it, with a hot-water bottle in between them. She tested it with her hand as she went by, not trusting Nurse Miller not to scald an unconscious patient, but it was just about right. There were swabs and a pair of tongue-forceps in a bowl on the locker and a screen ready, the top sheet and blanket were turned neatly back half-way across the bed. She decided that the new girl had learnt something from the Red Cross. The nurses had made a square packet of the top sheet and blanket on the next bed, for the accident case. They were spreading a brown blanket over the under sheet as she came up ; just in time, for the

doors of the ward had opened again to let in old limping Wright and Nurse Capper from casualty. What they had on the wheeled stretcher between them was a small boy wrapped in blankets. He seemed half-unconscious, but he did cry out a little as they lifted him on to the bed.

Sister Abbot glanced at his case-paper. A Pott's fracture of the right ankle, concussion and some bruises seemed to be what he had got off with. "He's to go up to the theatre for a plaster when they've finished operating, Sister," said Nurse Capper, folding the casualty blankets, and Sister Abbot nodded. "Get a cradle for that leg, nurse," she said to Miller, who of course had forgotten it, and to the new probationer, "Do you think you can undress him and wash him by yourself?" The tall girl responded quite eagerly, "Oh yes, please, Sister"; and added something unofficial about having a brother of just that age at home. "All right," nodded the old woman; "but don't touch this leg. I'll see to that later," and she walked down the ward after the casualty people, thinking with satisfaction that the new girl had a head on her shoulders.

She looked at the clock and saw that it was getting on for half-past two. She calculated that they should be well away with Pedlar's operation by now and wondered what they had found. She asked Nurse Miller whether she had finished the temperatures, went out on to the balcony for a minute to look at the bright afternoon sky, spoke to a couple of convalescents who were sunning themselves in the corner, came back again, looked into the ward kitchen and went towards her office. As she passed the ward telephone it rang. She answered it herself and heard the anxious voice of Nurse Carter. "Is that Lister Ward? Oh! is that you, Sister? Please, is Mr. Groom there?"

"No, why should he be?" asked Sister Abbot reasonably. "What's the matter, nurse. Haven't they started on Pedlar yet? It's nearly half an hour since you went up with him." "Yes, I know, Sister," replied Betty Carter's voice, small and clear in the telephone. "But Mr. Groom isn't here yet, and they don't like to start the anæsthetic till he comes. I've rung the hall porter, and he says Mr. Groom came in at two; we don't know where he is, or Miss Dean either. Sister Harbinger thought they might be in one of the wards." "Not in this ward," said Sister Abbot and replaced the receiver.

She went into office, sat down and wrote out the rest of the diet-sheets, then she made up the dispensary book.

She was interrupted half-way through this bit of work by a small bustle, Mrs. Pedlar being brought in and having to be told that her husband had not yet come down from the theatre. She was a small white-haired determined little countrywoman, with a sweet toothless smile and old hands wrinkled and knotted by years of work. She was very much frightened of the hospital and shivering in her thin clothes from the cold of the long drive in from Ramscote. Sister Abbot had a few words with her, then took her into the ward kitchen and told Nurse Miller to give her a cup of tea.

On her way back she looked round the screens at the new boy. Nurse Shepherd seemed to have made him pretty comfortable. She had undressed him and cleaned him up, eased him into a flannel gown and wrapped him up in a blanket under the big cradle. He was still fairly dazed from his knock on the head, but he had come round a little and was inclined to cry and complain. "He keeps on talking about a rabbit," said the new nurse, opening her blue eyes very wide as she stood with a bowl of water in her hands. "He wants to know where it is." Her clear accents roused the boy and he said again, fretfully rolling his head on his pillow, "Where's my rabbit? Please, I want my rabbit." Sister Abbot bent over him and told him in her warm comfortable voice, "He's in the hutch with the others." She had not the least idea what he was talking about, but she did not want him to throw himself about so restlessly until his leg had been properly set. Fortunately the words, or the tone of them, seemed to satisfy the boy. His dark fringed eyelids closed again, he sighed and dropped back into a gulf of sleep. Across the bed Sister Abbot met the innocent astonished stare of the new nurse. Her own eyes twinkled, but she merely said, "You've settled him down nicely. Tidy up here now and then go and help Nurse Miller cut the bread and butter for tea. It's getting on for three o'clock and we shall have that theatre case down again presently."

5

Mrs. Pedlar, the shepherd's wife, had been obliged to come fifteen miles to hospital, all the way from Ramscote, under the first green shoulder of White Sheet Hill. Her cottage was in a flinty lane, a torrent-bed for rainwater in winter; it led up slopes dotted with juniper bushes to the great earthwork called the Giants' Castle. The village was

half a mile lower down, clustering round watercress beds, where a spring welled up between the downland chalk and the valley gravel ; but the Pedlars' cottage had only a shallow well, which usually ran dry towards the end of the summer and then they had to fetch their water in buckets from the farm. Their cottage was two hundred years old and like nothing so much as one of the snail shells that you find on the downs, bleached, fragile and clinging close to the turf. Its thatch came down like eyebrows over its dormer windows, its cob-walls were immensely thick and a baking oven stuck out at one end, with house-leeks on the top. There was a vegetable patch behind the cottage, a chicken-run at the side and a long row of beehives by the fence ; Mrs. Pedlar was good with bees and they did well on the downland sainfoin and clover. Her goats were picketed up and down the grass verges of the land, or out in the field ; and she had a rabbit-hutch or two outside the back door. She was one of those women who must always be tending animals and children.

She had brought up six of her own, all gone out now into the world. Sometimes her grandchildren were sent to stay with her ; otherwise she lived alone in the cottage with her husband, but she never felt the lack of other company. She was a woman who had no fear of solitude and that was a blessing, for in January and February she was often quite alone there for many nights together. The shepherd went up then on to the downs, to his wheeled hut among the box-bushes, under the ring of ash-trees which the country people called Ramsbury Folly. That was his favourite place for a lambing-pen ; it lay sheltered from the eternal wind which blew over the crest and in a snowy winter, when the drifts piled up in the ditches about the earthwork, the slope by the Folly was a bare safe place for his sheep. There he would build up an encampment of his own, with hurdles and bales of straw, against the bad weather. Inside it the restless old ewes got up, moved about, and lay down again and the young lambs ran about bleating on their uncertain legs. It was cold up there on the downs at the turn of the year, when winter was melting into spring ; and often he did not have his clothes off for weeks together. Every day, wet or fine, his wife carried up his loaf and cheese and his dinner to him in a covered dish. She always made a pot of tea for him while she was there and they drank it together, sitting in his warm hut by the paraffin stove, among the sacks and sheep-skins, the medicine bottles and feeding-bottles, the pots of

tar and ointment and ruddle. Often there would be a weakly new-born lamb gasping and shuddering in the box of hay next the stove, and sometimes the shepherd's wife would get one to carry down to the cottage and bring up by hand.

Mrs. Pedlar had met her husband first when she was quite a young girl in service at Folly Farm. It was forty years ago, but she could still remember the very tall young man, with an old sack across his shoulders, coming down through the muck of the yard with a lamb in his arms ; and how its long black legs dangled and swung, as if they did not belong to its skinny body. That was the first of all the lambs she had reared for him. It used to lie in an old dog's basket by the fire in the farm kitchen ; and the young shepherd had shown her how to feed it out of a bottle, holding the creature gently and skilfully in his big hands, seamed with cracks and dark with dirt. After that he had courted and married her and taken her away to the cottage up the lane ; in all her life she had only lived in two houses, her father's and that one.

Even in her young days she had never cared much for going about and nowadays she scarcely ever left her cottage. When she did it was only to walk down into the village, or once a month to drive in with the farmer's wife on market day to Sheepbridge. Wilchester lay quite in the opposite direction. It was a place she had only visited once or twice in her life and she had never been inside the hospital there. When Dr. Siskin decided that the shepherd must go and see Mr. Groom the homekeeping old woman was quite bewildered. She did not even know how to arrange the journey ; it was so difficult in war-time, when half the buses and trains had been taken off and nobody had any petrol to spare. However, Dr. Siskin had driven the shepherd into Wilchester in his own car, the first time, to go to Mr. Groom's out-patients', because he had some errand in the town himself ; and the second time, when they sent for the shepherd all in a hurry, because they had a bed vacant and he was to have his operation quickly, the farmer had been very kind and had taken him in ; only neither time had there been room for Mrs. Pedlar. Now, however, she was told that she was to go to Wilchester herself, so as to be at hand after the operation. The rector's wife had arranged it all. The wife of one of the young pilots at Lambscot Aerodrome belonged to Margery Brewster's W.V.S. car-pool and she went in every other Monday to take a patient to the eye-clinic. She would pick up Mrs. Pedlar at the cross roads called Betty's

Grave, where a suicide had been buried, once upon a time, so the story went. Mrs. Pedlar must be there at a quarter past one precisely. So the shepherd's wife put out food and water for the hens and rabbits, moved the goats to a fresh pasture and left a note for the baker in the crack of the door. She dressed herself in her good brown coat and her black hat, the ones she kept for Sunday service, packed a basket of eggs with a bunch of rosemary on top, locked the back door, and took the milk-can and the dog down to the farm. "Now don't you worry about anything," the farmer's wife said. "Boy Harry shall shut the hens up to-night and let them out in the morning and take up an armful of kale for the rabbits. Just you stay as long as ever you're wanted; we'll see to everything here. Tell your man to get well as quick as ever he can, say we can't do without him." Mrs. Pedlar nodded, but she could not speak. She left the big jolly woman to her pastry-making and went on down the wintry lane, where every twig and berry sparkled with melting hoarfrost. The downs were still withdrawn into a mild haze, but the sun was beginning to break through; the air was sharp but quite still.

The little woman waited some time at the cross roads under the signpost, hugging herself in her coat, which was not a thick one; but presently a shabby car came chugging along, driven by a brisk and painted young woman in corduroy slacks. She had an orange scarf round her head and lips to match it, and the seat beside her was occupied by a large bull-terrier, who leered at the stranger out of his pink-rimmed eyes. "Jump in the back, Mrs. Pedlar," the young woman instructed her briskly, raising her voice above the noise of the engine. "I'm a bit late, I'm afraid." Mrs. Pedlar murmured, "It's very good of you to take me, mum," as she clambered in; the young woman, not wishing to be thanked, replied brusquely as they drove away, "Not a bit of it. Keeps the battery going and gives me an afternoon at the Wilchester shops, if you can call 'em shops." The other seat in the back was occupied by an old woman with a green shade over her eyes, who turned her head and sniffed the spicy smell of rosemary, but uttered no word. The car ran past the enormous dumps and hangars of the aerodrome, down the steep street of Lambscot, through the watersplash, past the little Norman church, stranded like an ark in the winter floods of Church Meadow, and so past Tadpole Hall by the low road into Wilchester.

It had been market day, but the best part of that was over

and the pens on the Beastmarket were nearly all empty. A few bewildered calves were being bundled up the tailboard of a lorry, a few crates of squawking fowls being carried away; a heap of pigs were snoring in the corner of a pen, and a leisurely old man was swilling and sweeping away the traces of the morning's work. A knot of farmers were smoking and talking after their market ordinary outside the doorway of the Fleece; the car-park was beginning to empty, and the butcher and his boy were herding some sheep down the archway that led to the slaughter-house. The shepherd's wife looked longest at the silly bleating things as the car threaded its way between the hurdles, across the Beastmarket, past the front of Yeoman's Hospital and round the corner into Abbot's Lane.

The strange young woman drove into the hospital yard and parked the car there. Wright the porter looked out of his box and when he saw who it was limped out to help the blind woman. He touched his forehead to the trousered young woman, who said again, "I'm late, I'm afraid." "Ah! should a' bin 'ere before two, by rights," agreed the porter, nodding his untidy grey head. "But I'll see she gets 'er turn, there's three or four of 'em waitin' yet. Who are you for, Missis?" he inquired, rounding on Mrs. Pedlar and cocking his eye at her.

She stammered her name and that she had come to see her husband. "T'ain't visiting day," old Wright grumbled. "Is he on the danger list, Missis?" and he eyed her more severely than ever, for he spent much time fending off the relatives of patients who tried to visit them on the wrong day.

Mrs. Pedlar swallowed the fear which choked her dry throat and murmured humbly, "This is the day he was to go under operation"; the country people always said it that way. The trousered young woman interrupted her to say to Wright, "I'll go down and do my shopping and fetch that woman at five as usual; what about you, Mrs. Pedlar? Shall you be ready to come away at five?" Mrs. Pedlar had no notion and was too frightened to speak. "All right, mum, you leave 'er to me," said Wright. "This way now; easy does it." He put his hand under the elbow of the blind woman and led her carefully along, jerking his head at Mrs. Pedlar to follow him; Wright's bark was always worse than his bite. When he had established the blind woman on the corner of a bench he turned back into his glass box, still grumbling under his breath and turning over a bundle of

tattered lists with a moistened thumb. "That's right," he admitted grudgingly. "Joseph Pedlar, Lister Ward; but he'll be up in the theatre now, I reckon. Mr. Groom is still down 'ere twenty minutes back, looking at a new case; they won't 'ardly 'ave started yet. You'll be in the nurses' way up there; sit down and rest yerself a bit while I ring through about 'im." Mrs. Pedlar hardly took in any of this, except that she was to wait and she sat down humbly on the corner of the nearest bench. All her life she had done what other people told her to do.

She looked nervously about her and did not understand what she saw. There were people sitting all along the benches in rows, a big bald man in a white coat looked out of a door, the tall Sister sailed through the hall like a queen, with a little nurse scurrying after; a policeman tiptoed past in squeaky boots, holding his helmet in his hand, and after him trotted a ported, pushing an empty stretcher with brown blankets folded upon it. The hospital smell of drugs, carbolic soap and old clothes frightened Mrs. Pedlar, as it would have frightened an animal, though she did not know what was making her feel sick and cold. She moved restlessly on the hard bench and the woman next her said, "They do keep you waitin' in this place, don't they? We bin sittin' 'ere since 'arf-past one."

She was an enormously fat woman, like an old sow, with little twinkling eyes and no bridge to her nose; and she shook like a jelly when she laughed, which she did constantly. She was evidently a friendly soul, one of those who must always be talking, red-faced, grey-haired and full of lively curiosity about her neighbours. When the shepherd's wife murmured timidly, "I don't know; I never was here before," she beamed with satisfaction at having found a novice to instruct. "Ah! Yeoman's is a good place to come to when you're in trouble. I've been in and out 'ere all me life. Why, I was born in Yeoman's, or so they tell me; and this girl of mine, she was born 'ere too. A lot of trouble she gave me," boasted the fat woman, pointing her thumb at the pale shapeless girl on her other side. "Two days and three nights, that job lasted; they manage things better nowadays. So when she was expecting 'er first, I says to 'er, you come along to Yeoman's with me, I says; they'll see you through."

The girl did not answer, but stared straight in front of her, as if she saw something that the others did not see. The two grandmothers exchanged experienced glances. "She ain't feeling too good now, of course," admitted the fat woman,

lowering her voice, "but what I tells 'er is, she'll be worse before she's better. That's nature, that is; and don't I know it?" She raised her voice and continued loudly and cheerfully. "Yes, round the corner's where I've lived all me life; and into Yeoman's I've popped whenever anything went wrong. Kids is always in trouble, ain't they? Falling out of trees, getting into the river, swallowing 'alfpence and such; doing themselves a mischief or daring each other to some sort of foolishness. I should know; I've reared seven." Mrs. Pedlar nodded her head gently. "I've always had to manage without much help," said she. "Out where we live, the doctor didn't like coming unless it was serious. We got through the best way we could."

"You come from far?" inquired the fat woman with lively interest; and when she was told "Ramscote" exclaimed, "Well, that's a tidy way to drive, ain't it? No wonder you look chilled to the bone. Excuse me, deary, but why don't you go through that way and get yourself a nice cup of tea? Warm you up a bit, that would. I know what it is when you've come a long way and missed your dinner. I'd come with you," she offered, seeing Mrs. Pedlar hesitate, "only I don't like to leave my girl, and if we both go we'll maybe miss our turn." But the shepherd's wife shook her head. Her throat felt too dry to swallow and she was afraid to lose sight of the porter's box.

"You waiting to see one of the doctors?" inquired the fat woman. "Excuse my asking, but you didn't ought to be sitting 'ere by rights not unless you was wanting Dr. Taylor." Mrs. Pedlar looking frightened, murmured, "The porter said to sit down while he found out about my Joe; that's the master, he's sick." The old-fashioned country word of her youth slipped out without her knowing it. She turned her faded blue eyes beseechingly on the fat woman, who clicked her tongue, exclaiming, "Bad, is he? well, he must be, I reckon, or you wouldn't be let come round 'ere on a Monday. Well, I *am* sorry about that." Mrs. Pedlar swallowed again and repeated, "It's to-day he goes under operation." "Deary me!" clucked the fat woman. "An operation, is it? that's a bad business. Did they tell you who was doing it?"

Mrs. Pedlar had no idea about that; "He's in Lister ward, they said," she offered humbly. The fat woman, with an air of authority, pronounced, "Then it'll be Mr. Groom. Monday's his day and well I knows it; seeing it was a Monday 'e operated on me sister. Gallstones," she explained

with pride. "Yellow as a duck's foot she was with 'em and suffered something cruel. Twice she come in 'ere before they found out what was the matter with the poor soul, but they done a good job on 'er in the end. Makes yer think, don't it? Syme ward she was in, both times. The Sister there is a bit of a tartar, but Lister is a proper good ward. My eldest boy was in Lister, last June as ever was. Cracked 'is jaw, silly kid, fell off a ladder when they was tilling the roof down at the new school. The workmen left the ladder up against the wall in the dinner hour 'an' never tied no plank on it, so stands to reason the boys must all be climbing; an' one way an' another my Bob come down quicker than 'e went up. Smashed 'is face up proper, silly kid; but Mr. Groom made a decent job of it, all things considered. Bob never was much to look at anyhow, takes after 'is father." She laughed, a jolly comfortable laugh, shaking herself all over. "Mr. Groom told 'im off to rights," she related. "Let this be a lesson to you, young man, not to go climbing roofs again in a 'urry, 'e says; but Lor! the boys will do it. Sister Abbot made a fine fuss of my Bob when 'e was in Lister. She's a grand woman; she'll look after your old man as good as you, an' better. What did you say was the matter with 'im, deary?" Her little pigs' eyes sparkled with friendly curiosity as she hitched herself closer along the bench.

Mrs. Pedlar was none too clear about that herself. "It's his stomach," said she doubtfully in her soft cracked country voice, "but I don't rightly know what's the trouble. I don't understand it. My Joe was always such a fine upstanding chap, never had a day's illness till now. They tell you a shepherd's life is a hard life but he never found it so. Out on the downs he was, in all weathers, night and day and nothing never ailed him till September last. Then he went right off his food, gradual-like. He couldn't seem to fancy nothing any more. It wasn't like Joe, he'd always relished my cooking." "Can't do much, can you? with the stuff you get nowadays," sympathised the fat woman; but Mrs. Pedlar declared, "Joe was never one to be fussy over his food. As long as he could get a bite of bread and cheese, he wanted nothing better. When he turned against his extra cheese-ration and said it didn't set easy on his stomach, I knowed there was something wrong; he always did like his bit of cheese as well as anything. Fell away something dreadful after that, he did, and Dr. Siskin, he gave him a bottle of that white chalk medicine, but it never done him no good. So then the doctor brought Joe to see this Mr.

Groom and now they say there's something got to be took away from him." Her pale frightened eyes were fixed upon the kindly cushioned face of her neighbour. "Deary me! deary me," sighed the fat woman, "the world's full of trouble these days. You bin married a long time, I suppose." "We've been married close on forty year," whispered the shepherd's wife, "and this is the first time my Joe's been away from me."

The fat woman nodded her head mournfully up and down. "The better they are," she sighed, "the worse it is when you come to lose 'em. Mine was took three years back, with a stroke, poor chap! 'E was a good man to me, except that 'e flew into such dreadful tempers when 'e was crossed, specially after a glass or two; but Lord! I wish I 'ad 'im back, temper an' all. The place ain't never bin the same since 'e died. I don't seem to get on right without 'im." Mrs. Pedlar said, under her breath, "If anything was to happen to my Joe, it would be like taking the roof off the house."

She stared straight in front of her but she did not see the crowded benches of the out-patient hall. She was like the sheep she had seen in the market-place, utterly bewildered and terrified, taken away from the soft fields they knew and driven along unfamiliar roads, with blows and shouting, into a strange cold building which smelt of death. She twisted her bony hands together to stop them shaking, and a tear rolled out of each eye. "Now don't you fret, deary," she heard the fat woman say with great kindness. "Likely things aren't as bad as you think. They'll give him the best of care in this place, you take it from me. I bin coming 'ere all me life and Yeoman's 'asn't never failed me. Look, deary, a nice cup of 'ot tea is what you want. You sit 'ere quiet an' keep my girl company an' I'll fetch it meself." She waddled off, clutching her handbag and came back presently with a mug of hot harsh brown tea, as sweet as treacle. "You drink that down," she commanded, standing over the shaking old woman; "an' don't talk so silly. Cold, that's what you are an' no wonder after that drive." Mrs. Pedlar obeyed meekly. The first few mouthfuls were hard to get down, but after that she did feel better and she finished the cup. "Oh, dear," she sighed. "Oh, dear, I wanted that." "I'll lay you did," said the fat woman, taking back the cup. "Come off without your dinner, most likely."

Sister Gater came along the row, looking harassed. "Move up to the front," said she; "don't leave any empty

places. Your girl's next now," and she stared at Mrs. Pedlar. "Where's your blue card?" she inquired. "Didn't you get one from the almoner?" and when the fat woman interposed, "She's waiting to go up to see a patient in Lister ward," replied firmly, "Then she shouldn't be on these benches; this is only for the ante-natal clinic." Old Wright the porter, however, came limping along at that moment and collected the bewildered Mrs. Pedlar. "That's all right, Missis," said he, in a much more friendly tone than before. "You're expected up in Lister. Just you come along with me." He limped before her, threading his way among the benches, pushed open a swing door and took her across an asphalted courtyard, through a second doorway, to the foot of a flight of stairs. "Up there," said he in his fatherly way. "First floor; you'll see the name painted on the wall. Ask for Sister Abbot." And away he went again and left her. "Oh! dear," sighed Mrs. Pedlar. "Oh! dear me," and she began to climb the stone stairs.

A clatter of footsteps came down as she went up, a sickeningly pale young man in a white coat, ginger-haired and freckled, passed by her and stared at her as if he were going to ask her what right she had there, but he did not speak to her and she did not dare to speak to him. There was a landing at the top of the first flight and two shining mahogany doors, exactly alike and opposite each other. Syme was written above the one and Lister above the other, but the shepherd's wife could not read very well, even when she had on her glasses. She put her hand timidly on the first door and pushed it ajar. There was a double row of beds, with men asleep in them under scarlet blankets and the bright afternoon sun slanted in through the windows. At first she could not see anybody stirring, but then through a gap between two red screens she saw a nurse, a rosy fresh-coloured yellow-haired girl on her knees, washing a boy's foot in a basin, among a litter of brown blankets and discarded clothes. The girl saw her, started up, almost upset the basin, saved it by a grab from among the bedclothes and got a splash of water right down her apron. Then she came out from between the screens. They stared at one another, the timid girl and the anguished old woman, and something vibrated between them, a chord of sympathy and understanding. "Please," murmured the shepherd's wife, "please, can I see my husband?" and the young creature, coming towards her with a child's friendly smile of welcome, exclaimed, "Are you the shepherd's wife from Ramscote?"

Are you Mrs. Pedlar? Sister was afraid you must have lost your way. She told me to fetch her as soon as you came."

CHAPTER EIGHT

I

SISTER HARBINGER said afterwards, with pardonable vexation, to her tried and trusted staff-nurse, that it had been a filthy afternoon in the theatre. "You get these sticky patches," said she, "when every single thing goes wrong on you from the word go and there isn't anything you can do about it." Nurse Webber agreed wearily that it had been a hell of a party and she would like to murder Mr. Groom; but the poor girl had toothache and scarcely knew what she was doing. In point of fact this particular afternoon had begun as well as any other. At ten to two precisely Sister Harbinger had been able to look round the theatre and decide that she and her staff had fulfilled the whole of the precise ritual which led up to the moment of Mr. Groom's arrival. The theatre was as hot as a conservatory; the big north window trickled with condensing moisture, the hard unshaded light of the overhead lamps glittered upon wet white tiles and steaming red cement floor; it winked back at her from polished brass and steel, from bowls and jars of coloured liquids and the thick green edges of glass shelves. The whole place hummed with familiar noises, like the engine-room of a ship. There was a soft continuous roar and an occasional spitting hiss from the water boiling in the small steriliser under the window; a jangle of china and a slop of liquid from the sink, where Nurse Webber, all muffled up in gown and veil, was putting out the surgeons' gloves; a screech of metal upon stone as Mason pulled up the anæsthetic machine and wheeled a couple of gas-cylinders forward. Then away he went down to Lister to fetch the first patient.

Out in the scrubbing-up room Nurse Webber had set out the surgeons' rubber boots and aprons, unlocked the tins of sterilised gowns and veils and put the nailbrushes to float in their bowls of disinfectant. Here in the theatre she had piled the trolley with bright drums of swabs, towels and dressings, filled the lotion-bowls on their tripod stands and dished up the great steaming tray of instruments. Sister

Harbinger counted these with her eye, while her mind ran over its accustomed litany: "Scalpels, artery forceps, retractors, sinus forceps, needle-holders, curved and straight needles, catgut, silkworm gut, rubber tubes," said she under her breath, unconscious that she was talking aloud. "Eights for Mr. Groom, sixes for Miss Dean and Sister," murmured Nurse Webber, checking the gloves. Miss Dean and Sister liked their gloves to be dry and powdered, but Mr. Groom was old-fashioned and must have his wet. It was tiresome of him. She fished them out of the steriliser, dumped them into a bowl of cold lotion and got down the bottle of sterilised glycerine. Under the lights the operating table stood empty, spread with mackintosh and clean linen, waiting for the first patient. The whole white glittering place seemed in perfect order, and on the window sill, the final touch of preparation, stood Mr. Groom's ritual half-pint of tomato juice, gleaming like a beaker full of citrated blood.

There had been a lot of trouble about Mr. Groom's tomato juice in the past. In the cheerful days of peace he had always maintained that he could not get through an operating afternoon unless he were refreshed with a pound or so of tomatoes at half-time; and used to support this fad by talking rather loosely about vitamins. In these days his tomatoes were a standing order from the hospital kitchen on Mondays and Fridays and were put out for him in a glass bowl on the tiled window sill, over the sink. War-time restrictions had interfered with this sacred routine and there had been several scenes about it, for Mr. Groom, when deprived of his tomatoes, behaved like a spoilt child robbed of a favourite toy. The problem had finally been solved by Home Sister, who was a local woman and had what might be described as a hereditary enthusiasm for the Groom family. She planted a long row of tomato plants under the warm south wall of the laundry, near the hot pipes; protected them with wire netting from the cats and laundry maids, and labelled them, "Mr. Groom's tomatoes," in case there should be any mistake. It was popularly supposed that she counted them daily and when they were ripe she stewed, sieved and bottled them with her own hands.

Dr. Shoesmith was wont to declare, "Groom's tomatoes are the last survival of the hospital garden. When Yeoman's was first founded, there was a resident gardener; he was required to supply the patients and the 'family' of nurses with all manner of garden stuff and to grow whatever medicinal herbs were needed for the dispensary. It appears

that he was also required to bury the remains taken from the operating theatre and the soiled bread poultices from the surgical wards. I forget how many pounds of bread had to be disposed of every week, but it was quite an astonishing amount; of course poultices were the routine treatment in those days, when every wound went septic." And he would add drily, being himself a keen gardener, "I daresay it made admirable manure."

Sister Harbinger's eye travelled from the tomato juice to the clock, which marked a couple of minutes after two; she had begun to say, "I do hope Mason won't be late with that patient," when there was a slight bustle at the door and in came Mason and Nurse Carter, pushing the trolley with the laparotomy from Lister. After them came the little cat-faced Czech R.S.O., and while they heaved the comatose patient on to the table, he fussed round a little with the anæsthetic machine, twiddling the cocks, squinting at the gauges, letting the rubber bag partly fill up with a soft sigh and hiss. Then he sat himself down on the revolving stool, swung himself gently this way and that in a meditative half-circle and hummed a queer bit of a tune. Sister imagined that it would be some sort of a folk tune from his native country. She did not much like him. He was a fussy argumentative little man, always full of cranks and grievances and he worked himself up into a great state of excitement, like all these foreigners, if the least thing went wrong. However, he seemed to enjoy an afternoon in the theatre as much as anything and he certainly gave a very nice gentle anæsthetic. She did not remember having trouble with any case on that account during his year of office. Only he was touchy about getting off sharp at five, and if the surgeon went on too long one of the residents had to be fetched up to finish for him. "How's your tooth?" she inquired of Nurse Webber out of the corner of her mouth and Nurse Webber said, "It's giving me hell, Sister; thanks for asking." "You'd better have some more aspirin," said Sister and nurse said, "I've just had fifteen grains, but it hasn't got going on me yet." She put her hand to her cheek and sighed, "I do hope we shan't go on very late."

Betty Carter chose this moment to report, smoothing down her apron, "Please, Sister, there's a fracture coming up at the end of the afternoon for a plaster." Nurse Webber cast her eyes up to the ceiling; she hated plasters, they made such a mess of the floor. Sister frowned and said mechanically, "We ought to have been told about that

sooner." She never liked having little oddments tacked off at the end of the afternoon, when she was wanting her tea. "I ought to be used to it after all these years in the theatre," she reflected. "The work's never done and people are always upsetting our time-table. It's an interesting job, I know, but I've had enough of it. I'll be glad when I'm out of it." She thought with satisfaction of going up to London to the regular hours of teaching and the fixed off-duty time of a Sister Tutor. She only half attended to Betty Carter's explanation, "Please, Sister, they only rang about it from casualty as I was coming out of the ward. Sister said to tell you as soon as I got here. It's a fractured tibia and fibula and Miss Dean's doing it." Sister Harbinger sighed and told Mason to get down a couple of tins of plaster bandages from the top shelf.

So far things had gone much as usual, but now there was a long wait. Sister began to experience the irritation of a good cook whose dinner will be spoilt if the guests keep it too long on the stove. The nurses looked at one another and raised their eyebrows; finally the Czech doctor began to fidget on his stool. "What has happened? Where is Mr. Groom? Why is he late?" Sister could not of course tell him; but to pacify him she sent Nurse Carter to the telephone in the dressing-room. "Ring up the hall porter," said she, "and find out whether Mr. Groom's come in yet." Betty Carter whisked off and came in again presently to report, "Yes, he got here at two," but that did not content the R.S.O.: he must needs send the girl out again to ring up the surgical wards and the casualty department. After a few minutes back she came, with her eyes rounder than usual, reporting brightly, "Mr. Groom and Miss Dean went down to casualty to look at a case. They're just coming up now, and casualty said to tell you it was an emergency for this afternoon. It's a cerebral abscess and it's gone along to Syme." "Well, really, what next, I'd like to know," exclaimed Sister Harbinger with pardonable irritation. "We shall be here till midnight at this rate." Nurse Webb sighed; she was supposed to get off duty at five, but hardly ever got off punctually on operation days and tooth was jumping horribly. The Czech doctor uttered vexed guttural exclamation, and even Mason, who seldom perturbed by anything, reminded Sister gloom "We're one trephine short; Mr. Dyer said to have a big one put right while he was away and wouldn't need

The Sister heard the sound of feet and voices outside

the passage. That would be Mr. Groom and Miss Dean coming up at last from casualty. They went into the dressing-room and Miss Dean put her handsome head round the door, looking a trifle harassed, to say, "Sorry we're late. Mr. Groom says we shan't be more than a few minutes now, sir; if you'll start the anæsthetic."

2

The Czech doctor grunted and hitched up his stool. He spun the cocks of the machine, till the rubber gas-bag filled and swayed; then he put the mouthpiece over the face of the man on the table. Presently he checked the pulse at the temple, raised an eyelid and moved one of his bright wheels a little backwards. Sister sent Nurse Carter into the dressing-room to help the surgeons. The girl left the door wedged open behind her and through the gap Sister Harbinger heard the rush and splash of running water; then in came Mr. Groom in his white rubber boots and his long apron, holding up his dripping arms. Nurse Webber scurried to dress him like a doll, spreading out his gown before him and tying its tapes behind. She muffled up his face in its mask, poured the glycerine over his hands and held out the gloves in their bowl; while Nurse Carter, in the background, attended to Miss Dean.

Sister Harbinger, with five years experience of the theatre at Yeoman's, knew well enough when Mr. Groom was in what she called a tantrum, and this was evidently going to be one of his bad days. The heavy sulky man greeted nobody. He smoothed the wrinkles of his gloves down his fingers with hasty impatience and then walked up and down between the sink and the doorway, six steps this way and six steps that, like an old lion in a menagerie waiting for a bone. He always did it when he was kept waiting for even a few minutes, and it fretted everybody's nerves. Sister tossed her head and wished she dared remind him that it was his own unpunctuality which had thrown out the time-table; he stood there scowling at the deliberate anæsthetist, fiddling with the taps of his machine, while the patient breathed heavily. The two young nurses had ripped off the patient's bandages and clipped the sterilised towels over him. Nurse Webber was painting the square of skin exposed between them with iodine till it glistened like wet brown silk. On the other side of the table, the assistant's place, Miss Dean was standing quietly, with her hands clasped before her in a ritual

attitude. Sister Harbinger glanced at the clock and wished the anæsthetist would hurry himself a little, but at that moment he twisted another of his mysterious wheels and said in his cross foreign way, "Is ready . . . Is ready."

Mr. Groom stalked up to the table. Sister Harbinger's swan-necked forceps hovered above the instrument tray, fished out the first of her scalpels and held it ready for his gloved fingers. She saw him make his first sweeping incision. Miss Dean just touched a swab to the lips of the cut and removed it again; there was a small spatter of blood on one of the towels, instantly checked as the girl snapped her artery forceps on to the severed vessel. Then the pair of them went to work in earnest for a minute or two, and Sister Harbinger was so busy with her instruments that she had no time to think what was going on.

All of a sudden everything stopped, like a clock when you put your finger on the pendulum. She looked up, astonished and there was Mr. Groom standing with his hand in the abdominal cavity. He said out loud, so that everybody in the theatre could hear him, "What's the use of sending me up a case like this? It's too far gone"; and he pulled out his hand and walked away.

Sister Harbinger glanced anxiously at his back. Miss Dean put in her hand where his had been and felt about under the man's ribs, while the nurses looked at one another and the Czech doctor adjusted the anæsthetic machine. "There's a pyloric growth all right," said Miss Dean, "and it's pretty high up. I can't get at it very well. It must have got a lot worse since you saw him last month in out-patients'." She was evidently vexed and angry, and Sister Harbinger was sorry for her. Very likely it was not her fault at all, these cases were notoriously difficult to diagnose in the early stages. Of course nobody liked to operate in what was probably an inoperable case; no wonder Mr. Groom was vexed. There was nothing he hated more. That kind of thing never ought to get on to the table, but what were you to do when there weren't enough beds and the waiting list was as long as your arm? She wrung out a length of gauze in hot saline and gave it to Miss Dean, who stuffed it into the abdominal cavity, while Mr. Groom fretted with his feet in the maddening way he had. "Well, what are you all hanging about for?" he demanded. "Sew up, sew up, and let's get on to the next case." Miss Dean hesitated a moment, then she pulled out the gauze and stretched out her hand behind for a needle. Just as she took it Mr. Groom changed his mind

again. "Well, I must try a resection, I suppose," said he, coming back to the table. "Not that it'll do the fellow much good; it's pretty certain to recur inside a year." Certainly, thought Sister Harbinger, there was something the matter with the man this afternoon. Usually he knew his own mind and would take no advice from any one. He did not even bite Miss Dean's head off when she pointed out, hopefully, that there didn't seem to be any secondaries in the liver yet. "Clamps," said he angrily, setting to work again; "clamps; and get that cautery ready." He was really maddening, thought Sister Harbinger, when he was in this mood, driving and harrying every one and making the nurses fall over their feet to fetch things. Nothing that you could do would please him.

They had a lot of trouble freeing the growth; at one time she thought they would never do it and Mr. Groom, tugging and swearing, seemed to be working much less confidently than usual. However, it came away in the end, she hoped completely; and Nurse Webber wrinkled her nose as the smell of charred tissue filled the theatre, that was a bit she always rather hated. Mr. Groom buried the seared stump and finished the first part of the operation. He asked crossly, "How's the patient standing it?" and the anaesthetist shrugged his shoulders. "Is not too bad," he allowed grudgingly, feeling the pulse while Sister sighed and looked at the clock. Ten to three and they still had the second and lesser half of the operation to do, connecting the remaining half of that mutilated stomach with a loop of intestine further down. Mr. Groom felt about in the wound and fished up a shining knuckle of gut, Sister stood waiting with a scalpel poised in the jaws of her dripping forceps. He had actually put his hand out to take it; then he drew back and said in a strange voice, "Here, you do it."

Sister was quite taken aback. She had never in all her experience of the theatre known Mr. Groom give anything so important away. He was a most jealous operator; all his house-surgeons complained that they got no experience from him, he would scarcely let them touch a straightforward appendix, let alone a short-circuit. The two nurses raised their eyebrows at one another, Mason turned round from the steriliser, the Czech doctor moved on his stool and even Miss Dean hung back a minute; but Mr. Groom thrust the knife at her and she took it, while he muttered, "Get on, get on for God's sake." He watched her narrowly while she got to work. It was a straightforward affair, of course, a

simple piece of cutting and stitching and good practice for the girl; only Mr. Groom never let anybody else finish anything that he had begun. Sister wondered whether he could be feeling ill; then she shrugged her shoulders and supposed, "He thinks it doesn't much matter, the man's going to die anyway." Up in the theatre you couldn't keep on remembering that cases were people; it was one down, t'other come on, all day and half the night sometimes. She did not know anything about this patient, except that he came from Lister.

She would have thought that Mr. Groom actually wanted Miss Dean to do the case badly, he watched her with such a jealous eye and did so little to help her. He even fidgeted with his feet when she did not get on as fast as he expected; it was too bad of him, Sister thought, enough to put anybody off. He always insisted on absolute quiet in the theatre when he was operating himself and cursed the nurses if they made the least noise. Miss Dean, however, did not let herself be flustered. She accomplished the little piece of work which he had given her to do with perfect deliberation, never glancing up from the brightly-lit field of operation; the listening membranes, the wandering red and purple threads of the blood-vessels, absorbed her attention entirely. She did not make any mistakes, though of course she did take about five minutes longer than Mr. Groom would have done. When she had finished a very neat pretty bloodless bit of work she looked up for further instructions. Then, as Mr. Groom said nothing to the contrary, she very composedly sewed up the long ridge of peritoneum, stitched the muscles together and clipped up the skin. Nurse Webber sluiced on the iodine and dropped a pad of gauze and wool on the scar; then she began winding and crossing a bandage round the man's bony hips, he was so light and thin that it was quite easy to lift him. The Czech doctor shut off his anæsthetic, he yawned loudly, stretched his bent back and let his gas-bag dwindle. Mason clashed the tray of dirty instruments into the sink, then he pushed the door open and went out for the wheeled stretcher.

Mr. Groom uttered a kind of dissatisfied grunt and turned away. Whether he was pleased or displeased nobody could tell. Nurse Webber stuck in her last safety pin and hurried to untie the strings of his gown; he peeled off his gloves impatiently, and there was a noise of tearing rubber. "There goes another pair," thought Sister vexedly. "He might take a little more trouble, he gets through twice as many gloves as any one else in the hospital." "What's the use of giving

me old gloves?" complained Mr. Groom and he pushed open the door of the dressing-room with his shoulder and went out without waiting to hear any excuse. "They were a new pair, Miss Dean," said Sister Harbinger plaintively to the house surgeon. "I put them out myself." Miss Dean nodded, smiled and went out after Mr. Groom by one door as Mason came by the other with his trolley. The shepherd from Ramscoate was taken away. Whether he would live or die was no longer a matter which need trouble Sister Harbinger, who had already switched her mind to the next case. It was a simple appendix from Lister; they ought to be able to make up some time on that, she considered, looking anxiously at the clock, if Mr. Groom did it himself. The nurses cleaned up the floor, refilled the lotion bowls, opened the sterilizer with a gush of steam and dished up a fresh trayful of instruments; Mason brought in the next case, the anæsthetic was started and the surgeons came back. It was twenty minutes past three.

Mr. Groom did do the appendix himself, but with perhaps not quite his usual speed and dexterity. Certainly he was not at all himself this afternoon; he actually told Miss Dean to do the third case, which was a hernia. The Czech doctor remarked on this unusual indulgence in the pause after she had finished, when Betty Carter had taken the patient back to Lister. Mr. Groom was drinking his tomato juice, walking up and down the wet mosaic floor in his rubber boots and apron and getting in Nurse Webber's way, as she strove to retrieve the dirty towels and gauzes from under the table. "Fräulein is busy this afternoon," said the R.S.O., crouching on his stool like a little mischievous gnome and swinging himself about. "You do not often give her so much work to do." He glanced at the dressing-room door, which had just sighed open and shut behind the girl as she went out. "Is clever," said he, in his grudging fashion.

Mr. Groom glowered, "She's got to get some practice, hasn't she?" he retorted, "if she's to take over your job when you go." Sister Harbinger heard him say it quite plainly, where she stood threading needles for the next case and pricked up her ears, though she pretended to be absorbed in what she was doing. "So . . ." said the anæsthetist, making a long-drawn foreign syllable out of it. "So . . . But I thought your son should do that." He was not afraid of Mr. Groom, he did not need to be, he was going away. "Well, you thought wrong," said Mr. Groom crossly, and he set down his empty glass, turned his back and shouldered

his way out into the dressing-room after Miss Dean. "Well, really," thought Sister Harbinger; "what next, I wonder." She could hardly believe her ears.

3

Then Nurse Painter brought up the cerebral abscess from Syme. It was a long exacting unsatisfactory business, but Mr. Groom, pulling himself together, did it very carefully and well. Of course it was right out of his usual line of country, but really, thought Sister, Mr. Dyer himself couldn't have made a nicer job of it. She had never seen Mr. Groom operate better. She gathered from what they were saying, that there had been some doubt about the diagnosis, but it was an abscess all right; when the surgeon had finished his chipping and drilling and pushed his forceps in, the pus came pouring out. "Well, you were quite right about that, young woman," said he to Miss Dean, in his harshest and most disagreeable voice, as she mopped and swabbed. "A good thing it wasn't left any longer." Sister Harbinger thought so too.

Everyone in the theatre was tired out by the time the case was finished and it was after five. The patient was wheeled away, lying on her side, with her pinched unconscious face half-hidden by a turban of bandages. Mr. Groom pulled off his mask and veil and wiped the sweat from his forehead; he looked old and out of temper and said quite loudly, "Thank God that's over." There was nothing else on the list except the broken leg from Lister, and Miss Dean said she would come back and do that at five-thirty. She knew that the theatre people would be glad of half an hour to turn round in. She went away with Mr. Groom and the little Czech doctor went away too; he said that one of the housemen must give the anæsthetic. So Sister Harbinger rang down to the residents' room and got hold of Dick Groom. He did not particularly want to come and sounded cross about it, but that was nothing to her. She and Nurse Webber swallowed cups of cold tea from a potful which had been standing in the dressing-room since half-past four, and Nurse Webber painted her gum with iodine once again round the aching tooth; but it did not help. The girl was nearly crying as they started to clear up the theatre. Mason began to scrub the instruments and put them away, while the women gathered up the armfuls of gowns and towels lying about in the dressing-room and dumped them into the

laundry basket. "My God! what an afternoon," sighed Sister. "Really, Mr. Groom gets worse and worse, I don't know how anybody stands him. I'd hate to be married to a man like that, wouldn't you?" and Nurse Webber giggled feebly, but a tear ran down her cheek. "You'll have to go sick with that tooth," said Sister.

Before they had quite done, back came Miss Dean and young Mr. Groom together. Dick seemed to be in a bad temper and was grumbling away to Miss Dean about not being able to get some house in the town that he wanted. Dr. Marriner, it seemed, had got the refusal of it for a week. "What does Marriner want with a house, I'd like to know," Dick demanded, but Miss Dean did not offer any explanation, and the young man stamped up and down the theatre, getting in everybody's way; at such moments, Sister Harbinger reflected, he was just like his father, but she did not have to be polite to him and she said tartly, "Now, Mr. Groom, if you please, will you start the anæsthetic? We're all behind-hand as it is." She thought she knew what was the matter with him; the case had just been brought in, and Nurse Clark had come up from Lister in charge of it. That was why the young man was fidgeting about with such a high colour and trying not to look at her, pretending unsuccessfully that he had not seen her. "Please, Miss Dean; do you mind if I send Nurse Webber off-duty," Sister said. "She's got the most frightful toothache, she ought to be in bed"; and Miss Dean, who was always considerate, said, "Of course not; we can manage. It's been a heavy afternoon, I'm afraid." "It has indeed," said Sister, looking glum.

Nurse Webber departed, holding her cheek, and Miss Dean and Sister Harbinger between them cleaned up and trimmed the boy's wound, putting on an extension and a plaster case. Miss Dean dipped the powdery bandages one by one in water, wrapped them round the limb and squeezed and smoothed them into a solid shining mould; the plaster dripped in great goutts on the floor; it was, as always, a simple but messy business. Dick Groom rocked himself to and fro as he gave the anæsthetic, the gas-bag bellied and collapsed in time with the patient's breathing. There was nothing in particular for Nurse Clark to do and she hated to be idle. "Shall I clean up a bit for you next door, Sister, as you're shorthanded?" she offered and Sister Harbinger, who liked her and had trained her for six months in theatre work, replied gratefully, "I wish you would. We're all at sixes

and sevens, with Nurse Webber feeling so bad." Out walked Nurse Clark with a swing, never looking at Dick Groom though she went so close to him that he could have touched her apron. He turned his head to look after her and Sister saw him do it. "Well," she said to herself, "I think she's well rid of him." She was another person who did not like Dick Groom and considered that he had treated Dolly badly.

4

"There you are, Sister," said Miss Dean. "Just let it harden for a few minutes and then the boy can go back to the ward." She went away, and Mason, at a nod from Sister, fetched a mop and bucket and started to sluice the floor before the plaster dried. The boy lay breathing heavily; Dick Groom stopped his anæsthetic and pushed the machine away. He sat for a minute or two swinging himself about on his stool, with his feet drawn up under him to keep them out of the wet and looking warily about him. Sister was at the sink with her back to him, counting forceps, Mason was mopping away, the boy on the table seemed quite comfortable. Dick put down his feet into a puddle, rose from his stool and in three strides was out of the theatre. The swing of the dressing-room door, quiet as it was, reached the ears of Sister Harbinger and she turned round; "who was that?" said she and then, "Do you mean to tell me he's left the patient like that on the table? I never heard of such a thing." She raised her voice and exclaimed, "Mr. Groom . . . Mr. Groom," but got no answer; the door was thick mahogany. "Put that bucket down, Mason," said she, "and tell Nurse Clark to come back," and she stood by the boy's head, tapping her foot impatiently. "Really," she thought, "these young men are too careless; you can't let them out of your sight for a minute."

Out in the dressing-room, Dick Groom had found Dolly with her back to him, scrubbing and splashing away at the sink over a trayful of the bloody instruments which his father had used. Her sleeves were rolled half-way up to her shoulders, and the water was running so fast that she did not hear him come in. He walked up behind her and put his fingers on the cool flesh of her arm as he had so often done before; but this time Dolly swung round immediately and shook him off. Her movement was so rapid and vigorous that she dashed the hot soapy water up into his face and for the moment blinded him. He rubbed the lather out of his

smarting eyes and protested, "Here, mind what you're up to, my girl. What did you do that for, I'd like to know?"

Dolly paid no attention to him. She dumped a handful of glittering forceps into the draining-tray and turned the tap full on to them. "Stop messing about with those instruments," Dick commanded, raising his voice, "I can't hear myself speak," but Dolly merely retorted, "Nobody wants to listen to you. Better hold your tongue." He only heard her imperfectly himself, but he could guess from the look on her face what sort of remark it had been. When the rush of water abated a little he pleaded, "What's the matter with you, this afternoon? but she only turned the tap off firmly and declared, "There's nothing the matter with me. I'm just too busy to be bothered with you." He found himself pleading, against his better judgment, "Then when can I see you? What time shall you be off-duty to-morrow?" She retorted, "That's nothing to do with you. From this on you'll have something else to do with your spare time than getting under my feet." And she dumped the instruments with a resounding clash into the bowl at her left hand.

Dick glanced nervously over his shoulder; he thought that he had heard Sister Harbinger call out his name from the theatre. She might come in any minute and then he knew there would be trouble. Nevertheless he persisted helplessly, like a vexed child, "But I've got to talk to you sometime, I've got to explain what's happened, haven't I?" Dolly set the tap running again and began to rinse her fine hands and arms under the gushing water. Then she turned off the long handle with her elbow in one swift practised hospital gesture and shook a shower of glittering drops from her wrists and finger-tips all over his white gown. "You can't explain that away, however long you talk," said she bitterly.

The door swung open and old Mason poked his white-capped head in from the theatre. "Patient waiting, nurse," said he tartly and disappeared again like a cuckoo into a clock. Dolly pulled down her sleeves again over her bare arms, slipped on her cuffs and walked past Dick as if he were a stranger. There was a pool of spilt water and blood at her feet on the steaming pavement, but she did not trouble to avoid it. He followed her pleading, "Dolly, I must see you," but she would not look back at him. "That's all over and done with," said she firmly. "I'm going away from here. I don't ever want to see you again." He called out after her, in suppressed and sulky accents, some final furtive appeal, ending in her name; he was terrified lest he might

be overheard. She did not even turn her head, but pushed the door open and walked into the theatre, and he saw the heavy shining mahogany swing to behind her; for him that was the end of Dolly Clark. In a slow daze he pulled off his cap and white gown and dropped them on the soiled floor. Mopping his forehead he said to himself, with heart-felt relief, "I'm well out of that," and after another minute, "She could have made a lot of trouble." He glanced nervously round the dressing-room and sneaked out by the farther door. When Sister came marching out of the theatre he was gone.

CHAPTER NINE

I

JOAN SHEPHERD, down in Lister, had begun to think that the day would never end. All the nurses hated a long afternoon on; it seemed much more tiring than the days when you had a break before or after tea, and the time off in the morning never quite seemed to make up for it. Certainly Joan found that it was much easier to do her work properly as long as Nurse Clark was off duty and there was only comfortable stout Sister Abbot writing at her table, or walking up and down, looking about with her wise old eyes, missing nothing, setting things right with a word. It was fun taking round the tea trolley at three o'clock, beginning to distinguish a little between one patient and another, asking them what they liked to drink and whether you should refill their cups. She had become brave enough to look all these strange old and young men in the face and not blush too deeply when they made a joke about her. She had even begun to learn a little where things were kept. With the rich yellow light of a declining winter sun pouring in for half an hour through the tall windows and the fire burning brightly, the ward seemed quite a pleasant place.

Just after half-past three the shepherd from Ramscote was brought down from the theatre, and there was a little bustle going on about him behind the screens. She was sent hurrying to fetch one thing and another, a big cradle with electric bulbs tied to it, blocks, a splint and bandages, more hot-water bottles and a saline transfusion apparatus. When she peeped through the screens a little later they had got the foot of the

bed blocked up and the man was lying flat under the electric cradle. His head had slipped sideways and he seemed scarcely alive at all. His mouth was half-open and he breathed in and out with a faint whistling noise. The girl realised with terror how transparent his lips and nostrils were; all the blood seemed to have been drained out of them. His face looked as if it had been carved out of yellow wax or old ivory, and the long red rubber tubes of the transfusion apparatus coiled down upon him like the tentacles of an octopus clinging to their victim. Sister Abbot was standing beside the man, feeling the pulse at his wrist, and on the other side of the bed sat the little old woman who was his wife. She had her bony wrinkled hands clasped upon a shabby black handbag, which she clutched as if she dared not let it go, while she stared at the man in the bed with her faded blue eyes. "Oh, Sister," she sighed, "he isn't going to die, is he?" Sister Abbot said heartily, "We won't let that happen." Young Joan was too frightened to speak, she crept away on tiptoe.

The sun went down in a skyful of pink feathers and the lights were turned on in the ward. After Joan had drunk her own tea in the kitchen she got more mackintoshes to scrub in the sluice, a cold and tiring job, though she tried to go at it with a will. Her feet were beginning to ache dreadfully and so were the backs of her legs, while after a time the pain spread to her shoulders and forearms. Betty Carter brought down first one theatre case and then, rather later, the other one; she joined Joan in the sluice and began to scrub a mackintosh rather languidly, watching the hands of the clock travel towards five and grumbling about the long afternoon she had had in the theatre. "Mr. Groom was in a frightful temper about something or other," she related. "He was half an hour late to start with, and even then he couldn't make up his mind whether it was any good operating on Pedlar or not. He walked up and down the way he does, stamping his feet, swearing at everybody, making a fuss and saying it wasn't any good, asking him to do that sort of case; the man would die inside six months anyway. Then he changed his mind and started on it and finally he turned it over to Miss Dean to finish. I suppose he decided it wasn't any good after all, because he hardly ever lets one of the residents touch a case. I don't know whatever was the matter with him this afternoon." She started to sluice the water over her soapy mackintosh when she was interrupted by Joan's frightened voice, "You mean he's going to die?"

"Who's going to die?" said Betty, staring and then, "Oh! you mean Pedlar. Well, he may die or he may live, it's too soon to tell. He's got cancer of the stomach, anyway." She tossed her head, proud to display her newly acquired knowledge. The new girl stood staring, her fresh colour all gone. "Oh, dear," she murmured. "Oh, dear; I didn't understand." "Don't look at me like that," said Betty crossly, "do for goodness' sake get on with that mack; you'll have Sister in presently wanting you to help her with the dressings. She likes to take the new pros round in the evenings, when there isn't too much of a rush on. I will say for Sister Abbot, she's very decent about making time to teach you. Nurse Clark's too mean even to let a girl take out stitches, but Sister Abbot will let you try things. Why, yesterday she even let me do part of Burgess's dressing, and I must say it's pretty frightful still. Of course it's nothing to what it was. At the beginning," said Betty darkly, "he used to have to have gas for it, and nobody was allowed to touch it but Miss Dean or Sister." "Is that the man in the corner with the face?" whispered Joan, looking terrified. "Well," replied Betty Carter, with the hard unkind sound which served her for a laugh, "I shouldn't call it a face myself." She turned and flung the orange rubber sheet with one powerful careless movement over the edge of the bath. Young Joan opened her mouth, but no sound came out of it: she looked like a kitten too weak to mew. "Do hurry, for goodness' sake!" urged Betty, "or you'll get into trouble."

Then Nurse Clark came back and looked round the corner of the door. "Haven't you girls finished with those macks yet?" she demanded. "I suppose you think you've got all night for them. I'm just going up to the theatre with that new boy from casualty. It's time you were off-duty, Nurse Carter." "Please, I'm just going," said Betty, "Only I must put up the black-out screens before I go," turning down her sleeves. Then the two of them departed, leaving Joan scrubbing forlornly away at a big white rubber sheet. "Oh, dear," she sighed to herself, "Oh, dear," and a tear ran down her cheek and dropped on to her hand.

Some little time later Sister Abbot put her head round the door. Her face changed as she saw Joan still drooping over the table and she began briskly, like Nurse Clark "Haven't you got that sheet clean yet, nurse?" Then she changed

her tone, glanced sharply at the girl's face and said, "Well, rinse it off and leave it now; I want you to come round and help me with the evening dressings. There are some stitches to take out, and I want to see how Burgess is getting along. Bring the trolley out for me, will you?" The girl stood leaning on her hands, but she did not make any move. "What's the matter with you, child?" demanded Sister Abbot. "Aren't you well?" and she came a step nearer. At that Joan's lower lip trembled and the tears of extreme fatigue came into her eyes. "I can't," she murmured, "I can't," and began to shake all over. She wanted to stop herself, but she could not keep still and stood there, bowed over the table, shaking and leaning on her hands.

"What's all this?" said Sister Abbot. She shut the door behind her, so that the sounds of the ward were cut off and immediately changed into quite a different person, a stout friendly old woman, looking kind and troubled. "This won't do," she told Joan kindly and firmly. "The work's got to be done, you know; however you feel about it. That's what you're here for." The good-humoured asperity of her voice steadied the girl a little, but in a weak wailing voice she said, "I can't go on . . . I can't go on. It's all so awful. I didn't think it would be like this." "What did you think it would be like?" asked Sister Abbot reasonably. "To-day's been an easy day, it has indeed. I don't know what you'd think of Lister if we had a real rush on." She eyed the girl sharply as she demanded in a hearty grumbling way, "What's upsetting you, I'd like to know? I thought you seemed a sensible sort of girl," and stood tapping her foot smartly upon the ground. The action confused Joan, who faltered, "That man . . . the shepherd from Ramscoate . . . Betty says he isn't going to get better." She looked up hopefully, begging for contradiction, but the old woman only answered sternly, "We can't tell about that yet. It's too soon to say. We're doing all we can for him," and when the child's face did not clear asked her sharply, "Is that all? or has Nurse Carter been saying anything else to upset you?" Joan looked all round, gulped down a sob and whispered, "That man . . . in the corner . . . she says he hasn't any face."

"She has no right to tell you any such nonsense," declared Sister Abbot roundly in a most indignant voice. "Mr. Groom and the eye-specialist have made a very good job of the case, all things considered. They've saved the sight of one of his eyes and they're quite hopeful about the other."

At first they thought he'd be stone-blind. Nurse Carter has no business to frighten you about it. I'll speak to her myself." She continued with rough good-humour, "You shouldn't let yourself be frightened so easily. Don't you know when people are trying to show off? or trying to find out how much you can stand? If you want to know about anything that worries you, ask me; don't ask Nurse Carter. Did she tell you how Burgess's accident happened?" The child shook her head and was dumb. "It was over at Lambscot aerodrome," said Sister Abbot. "He's nothing to do with the flying himself, he's a civil engineer, and he's got some job on the building side of it. I can't tell you what; but he was there in the office, talking about one of their new hangars, when a plane crashed outside, just as it was taking off. He ran and pulled out one man alive and went back to try for another, with ammunition going off all round him. It's a wonder he wasn't killed. It was as brave a thing as a man could do," said Sister Abbot. "Of course he was frightfully burned about the face and hands. We've had a terrible time with him, at one time we thought we shouldn't save him; but he's a very strong young man and he's pulled through. Now it's just a matter of time and patience. Shall I tell you what worries him most?" asked Sister Abbot. "He's afraid of what he's going to look like afterwards. He won't say it straight out, but I know that's his trouble. Now if you're going to make a fuss about it, you'd better keep out of sight of his dressing for a day or two till you're a bit more used to things. I could make you watch it if I chose, but that's not my way. If you haven't the nerve for it," said Sister Abbot, watching the girl's troubled face narrowly, "you're better away. I don't want him upset."

Young Joan had backed against the wall till she could go no further and was standing there with her hands thrust out before her as if to keep something away; but after a long minute she clenched them together, swallowed a lump in her throat, shuddered all over and forced herself to say, "I'll come." Sister Abbot nodded her old head in approval. "We may as well get this straight, first as last," said she in her strong homely way. "You'll never be any good in the world till you've learnt to look things in the face. You'll see worse than that boy, before you're through. I know this hospital life is pretty frightening at first, but you've got to get used to it. We've all had to get used to it. Good Lord!" she sighed, "don't I remember how I hated it all at the start. You're only a baby, I suppose you've just begun to find out

how much misery there is in the world. Well, you can't cure it ; that's got to be faced. None of us can cure it ; the most we can do is to help folks through their bad times. We've no time to think about our own troubles in this place ; there are thirty men out there in the ward to be fed and cleaned and made comfortable, we couldn't get through our work if we stopped to think about our own feelings. You've got to grow a crust over those, before you're any use to me. It's a pity, I dare say," said Sister Abbot, with an unexpected sigh, looking at the girl's innocent and downcast features, "but there it is. You've got to grow up sometime. Even a kitten's got to grow into a cat and learn to catch mice for her living." The child's face quivered between woe and mirth and she uttered a feeble little shaken laugh. "That's right," said Sister Abbot, with brisk satisfaction. "Now let's have no more of this nonsense, child. Wash your face and put that cap straight and bring your dressing-trolley into the ward. I've wasted enough time in here as it is." And out she marched, with a secret sigh for herself. It was such a very long time since she had been that age.

3

Young Joan, immensely ashamed of herself, splashed ice-cold water over her flushed face, gathered her dishevelled yellow fluff of hair under her cap, which still remained a trifle askew, gave a gulp and a sob and put her weight behind the white enamel trolley. She pushed its jingling load of bowls, dressing tins and coloured lotion bottles, out into the ward where the evening scramble had already begun. The big windows were blacked-out and the unshaded lights stared down upon bedclothes tossed over the ends of empty beds, basins of water and piles of clean linen, convalescents wandering about in flapping grey dressing-gowns and slippers, while Nurse Clark and Nurse Miller made beds for dear life all round the ward. Joan Shepherd, still pink about the eyelids and a little unsure of herself, steered the awkward trolley through this confusion on its thick rubber tyres and worked it down to where Sister Abbot was lifting the lid of the bubbling steriliser. "Number Six first, nurse," said she. "It's ten days since he was done, time his stitches were out."

Joan obeyed meekly and then had to give all her attention to the quick run of the old woman's orders. "Put the screens round first always. Then pour out the lotion into these bowls and fill it up half-and-half with the boiled water. Take the

long forceps out of the jar and put out the instruments; scissors and dissecting forceps are enough for him and half a dozen swabs. Turn back the bedclothes and undo that bandage while I scrub up, but don't touch the dressing. Leave that for me." She abandoned the girl and went off to the centre table; the fair sleek-headed youth in the bed encouraged her as she blushed and fumbled. "You're new to-day, nurse, aren't you? Well, take it easy and don't look so scared. You'll soon get into the run of it." She murmured that she was afraid of hurting him and he scoffed, "I'll soon tell you if you do."

Then Sister Abbot came back and took out his stitches very delicately and quickly, as if she were doing embroidery work. "Now don't tell me that hurt you," said she to the grinning man in the bed, "for I shan't believe you. Hold the receiver a bit nearer, nurse; now open that tin and turn back the towel, but don't touch the gauze inside. There's a roll of surgical strapping in the drawer, or should be. Mr. Groom made a good job of your appendix, my lad; and not before it was needed. To-morrow you can get up for half an hour in the afternoon, and your wife can fetch you home on Friday. We can do with your bed. Wash those instruments, now, nurse, and drop them in the steriliser; now put out the same for the next case." They did the round of the clean cases first and then it was time to work the trolley into the awkward corner where Robert Burgess lay with his cotton wool mask over his face. "Now, wake up," said Sister, "we've come to change your dressing."

He turned his head aside on the pillows and murmured, "Oh, Lord, Sister, has it got to be done again? Nurse Clark went all over it this morning and she didn't half make a job of it." "I won't do more than I can help," Sister promised him, "I shan't touch your hands to-night, but I must just see how those eyelids are getting on." He uttered a long sigh and the girl's heart echoed it. She must have moved a little for Sister said immediately, "Now nurse, all I want you to do just at present is to hold that receiver for me." She breathed, "Yes, Sister," in her small meek voice, like a lost lamb bleating under a hedge in March, and the young man turned his head towards her again, as if he were trying to see. "No, this way, please," Sister instructed him. "Keep still a minute now; I'm only going to undo your bandages." Her skilful old hands were unwinding and gathering turn after turn of the bandages round his head and all the while she was doing it she talked

to him softly and cheerily, like a mother talking to a child. "We must soak this off," she warned him. "A bowl of fresh lotion, nurse; not too hot, put a little more distilled into it. Now this is when I want you to keep quite still for a few minutes. Nurse will steady your head." She gave the shrinking girl a long careful look. "Stand behind him and put your hands on each side of his forehead," she instructed her.

The tall girl put her hands where she was told. She was afraid to the marrow of her bones, but she was determined to hold on, whatever happened. "You won't stir, will you, Burgess?" Sister urged the young man insistently, but he did not attempt to move. The girl held her breath, intent on doing what she had to do. She felt the hard bones of his skull, the warmth of his black moist hair, growing again in soft curls where it had been burnt or cut away. She could feel his pulse throbbing in the hollows of his temples; what a strong heart this must be, to have endured so much and yet go on beating so steadily. She bit her lip and fixed her eyes on Sister Abbot's hand, dripping wet saline from the cotton wool on to the caked gauze of the dressing. Her hands were shaking and her knees too, but she held on and though she shut her eyes when the gauze dropped away from the man's face, she opened them again and looked steadily at his swollen and misshapen features. It was bad enough, but nothing could have been so bad as her own imagination. She found that she could look at it a second time and a third; she even fancied that she could distinguish what sort of face he had once shown to the world and might presently show again. "That's right," said Sister Abbot. "We're doing very well. Only a few minutes more." Joan thought that she was speaking to both of them. Then the dressing was done and she stood up and straightened her old back as if it ached a little with stooping. "That's enough for to-night," said she. "Clear everything up, nurse, and then you can take down the dispensary basket."

4

Joan was so new to her work that she did not recognise this order as a reward. All the young nurses liked going down to the dispensary, it was a chance to get away from washing and bedmaking for ten minutes at the most tiresome time of the day. She meekly fetched the big medicine basket and left the ward. Outside she met Nurse Painter, the gay and

cheerful second-year nurse from Syme, the women's surgical ward across the landing, and the two of them went down the staircase together, and away by the long cold passage to out-patients'. It was dreary enough down there at six o'clock of a winter's evening, when half the lights were out and the door shut on the frosty night. The big hall was dark and quiet, with benches and chairs piled on one another and nobody about. Miss Cutler the almoner had gone home. Sister was off duty, the porter had retired to his lodge, where just the top of his head could be seen through the glass screen as he read his newspaper, and Nurse Capper was sitting as close to the fire as she could get, padding a splint and yawning her head off. She was glad enough to have company. There was nothing that need have kept the seven young nurses long away from the wards, from Syme and Lister, Harvey, Linacre and Sydenham, Jenner and Chamberlayne. Each of them had only to tap at the dispensary shutter, hand in an empty basket and receive a full one, but it was the regular thing to put in ten minutes or so round the out-patients' fire. The dispensary hatch was the liveliest market for gossip anywhere in Yeoman's. Young Joan, a new girl in this school, knew no better than to do her errand and come away; but there were several minutes of delay while the old dispenser routed round for sulphanilamide powder, and as she waited she heard behind her the flap and scurry of the six other girls running together like hens to scattered corn. Nurse Capper had flung them a scrap of gossip to take back to the wards. "Did you hear what an ass young Mr. Groom made of himself about Mr. Dyer's case? She was an awful girl who looked like a half-wit and he couldn't be bothered to examine her, just told her to run home again and come back next week. She damn' nearly went, too; Sister hauled her back just in time and got Miss Dean to look at her and gosh! she was a cerebral abscess all the time. Just fancy if she'd gone home and died on them!" "We got her in Syme," grumbled Nurse Porter, "and was she dirty? I'll say she was. It took me the best part of an hour to clean her up for the theatre. The old man was in an awful temper when we got her up there, giving everybody hell. I suppose he was pretty sick about it." "Webber came along to us," contributed the nurse from Linacre, "to borrow some oil of cloves for her tooth before she went to bed and she said old man Groom had given them a perfectly frightful time up in the theatre. She was crying her eyes out, poor wretch! what with the tooth and his crossness." "Well, can

you wonder?" said the nurse from Jenner. "He must have been as sick as mud when he found what a mess young Mr. Groom had made of things. It'll all come out, of course, with Miss Dean and Sister Gater knowing what happened." "Sister Gater was as pleased as Punch," declared Nurse Capper. "How she does hate that young man!" "Well, he's done for himself now," said the Jenner nurse. "It'll be all over the hospital in no time," and she sighed, for she thought Dick Groom a handsome fellow.

"You've been a long time," said Nurse Clark tartly, when Joan got back to the ward. "Well, now you have found your way back, I suppose I shall have to let you do the evening temperatures. Nobody else has time to do them. Not the four-hourly ones, only the six-o'clocks. I hope they taught you how to take a temperature when you were over at the training school; none of you girls seem to learn anything there nowadays." Joan murmured meekly that she thought she did know that, and Nurse Clark said mechanically, "Well, don't make a mess of the charts," but with less spirit than earlier in the day. She seemed as if a little of the edge had been taken off her sharp tongue.

She disappeared behind Pedlar's screens and the girl went slowly and carefully round the ward, proud to be trusted with what she regarded as yet another bit of real nursing. She was happily unconscious that in a ward full of clean surgical convalescents, the temperatures of such cases as were not on four-hourly charts mattered very little. It gave her a pleasant responsible feeling to finger the thread of life in all those hard male wrists and count its even vibrations; to go from bed to bed putting the short cold stick of glass between the obedient lips of these strangers; to make neat dots and lines and enter figures on the charts, just as if she were a real nurse. Most of the men were sleepy and inattentive, but some looked at her and talked a little; one man said with a long sigh, "This is a queer place to be," and she echoed his sigh with unconscious fervour. The long ward seemed to her the strangest place she had ever entered, and yet already it seemed to her as if she had forgotten that there could be any other place outside.

Like a child keeping the best thing to the last, like a woman putting off something of which she is afraid, she left the bed in the corner till the very end. Robert Burgess was lying with his head on his arm and she thought at first, with a throb of regret, that he was asleep and should not be waked; but he heard her footfall, light as it was and roused up. So then she

had to gulp and say, "Please, I've come to take your temperature." He muttered "Go ahead"; and turned on his pillow, but she remained at a loss. What was she supposed to do? when both his wrists were muffled up in cotton wool. The restless seeking movement of his head troubled her. "What's the matter?" he asked her with a blind man's suspicion and impatience. "Why don't you start? Where are you? What are you doing?" She confessed, "I haven't done it before. Please, where do I feel your pulse?" He laughed then and his voice changed and became the kind voice she had heard already. "Oh, it's you, is it? the new one again, the frightened one. Do what you did this evening when Sister was messing about with my dressing; put your hand on my forehead." She said, flustered, "Oh, yes, of course; I remember, they told us that at the training school." She put the thermometer a little clumsily into his mouth, between the bandages; then timidly pressed her fingers into the hollow of his temporal bone and felt the strong pulse there, as she had done before. It took her a little longer to count than the others had done, but she managed it somehow.

When she had finished and had written up the chart, she turned to go, but he asked her suddenly, "Did it frighten you very much? I mean my dressing?" She gasped as he went on, "You don't have to tell me: I knew you were terrified. Your hands were as cold as ice and you were shaking all over. It scared you out of your wits." She could not open her mouth, and all of a sudden he felt about blindly and caught at her hand. She dared not draw it away, but she stood trembling. "Now you can't run off," he told her, in fierce triumph, "Now you've got to tell me what I want to know. What sort of a face have I got left? What am I going to look like when they've finished with me?" She pleaded weakly, "I don't know... I never saw anything like this before... how can I say?" and he uttered a long groan. "They won't tell me, nobody will tell me," he complained, holding tight to her head. "Sister swears it's going to be all right, but they won't let me have a looking-glass when my bandages are off, they keep on telling me not to try and use my eyes yet. I reckon I know what they mean; they think I couldn't stand the sight of myself." She dared not speak for fear of bursting out crying. In a moment the agonising grip of his fingers relaxed and he flung himself back on his pillows. "All right..." he muttered, "you needn't say anything. I'll have to take it, I suppose," and then he told her fiercely, "For God's sake go away."

She had to speak then, if she died for it. She drew a long breath and made her voice steady. "Yes, I was frightened," said she. "Of course I was frightened. It's my first day here, and I never saw a bad dressing before. They told me you were the worst case in the ward, and I started imagining things; I was silly, I thought I shouldn't be able to look at you." She took a step closer to him and twisted her fingers together. "I did look," she told him, "and after that I wasn't frightened any more. It's all right; I promise you it's all right. Oh! you must believe me; do tell me you believe me."

He lay silent for a full minute and she did not dare to move a step; at last he uttered a long low sigh, as if he had been holding his breath and could not dare to let it go. "All right; all right," he muttered. "I believe you." She looked all round her, wondering whether even yet she dared leave him and saw Nurse Clark staring at her from the other side of the ward. "Please, I think I have to go now," she murmured, in her little meek voice. "I think nurse wants me, but you won't go on worrying, will you? Oh! please do promise you won't." Nothing at all seemed to matter if only she could hear him say that. He answered gently, "All right, I won't," and after another long sigh asked her, like a child, "You'll be here again in the morning, won't you?" She told him, "Yes, I'll be here," as solemnly as if she were taking an oath and then went away on tiptoe, as quiet as a mouse, but her heart in her breast was as light as a feather. Nurse Clark told her sharply, "There isn't time here for you to stand gossiping with the patients," but she scarcely heard, and it did not trouble her in the least. She had something better than that to think about now.

Then came the pleasant nursery bustle of the evening suppers, pushing round the trolley with mugs of tea and cocoa, carrying trays, washing faces, tidying up the ward for the night. She went through all that in a happy daze of fatigue and scarcely knew what she was doing. By this time she could hardly drag one foot after another, but though it was the morning scurry repeated, all was in an easier warmer key, with hushed voices and lowered lights. Time slipped by like a gentle river, and at eight o'clock Sister Abbot stood up to read prayers. "*Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord; and by Thy great mercy defend us from all perils and dangers of this night; for the love of Thy only Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen.*" said Sister Abbot, closing the book and giving it back to the staff-nurse. In the wards of Yeoman's Hospital another day had ended.

Down in the residents' room Arthur Cook was industriously writing up his cases at the table and Sophia sat reading the daily paper with her feet up at the side of the fireplace. A little before seven Dick Groom came in, looking bold, handsome and on top of his world. He was dressed for the family dinner up at the Brewsters', to celebrate his engagement, and had his overcoat hanging loose and his white scarf dangling from his neck. He stood rubbing his hands before the fire, keeping it off the other two and declaring loudly that he must get warm before he went. Sophia did not pay any attention to him, she folded her paper inside out and began to read the middle page. She had various reasons just then for not wanting to talk to Dick Groom. Arthur Cook, however, glanced up with his usual lively air and remarked, jerking his head towards the notice-board. "There's a note for you over there. Pussyface left it before he went out." The young people used that nickname for the R.S.O. among themselves.

Dick removed himself reluctantly from the hearthrug, fetched his note and brought it back to read by the fire, frowning at the spiky foreign handwriting. "Wants to see me as soon as he comes in," he scoffed, crumpling the paper into a ball and aiming it at the waste-paper basket, which it missed. "Likely, isn't it? I'm just off to Claypits and I shan't be back till late. Whatever it is, I suppose it can wait till the morning. Pussyface is always going up in the air about something." He glanced from one to the other of his companions. Sophia remained apparently absorbed in her newspaper, but Arthur Cook remarked with his demure schoolboy grin, "Pussyface is after you about some case you saw in out-patients' this morning." He had been down to the dispensary half an hour earlier, to complain about the latest batch of insulin and the lively Nurse Capper, a great ally of his, had given him the whole of the story about the cerebral abscess in Syme. He knew perfectly well why the R.S.O. was chasing after Dick and was delighted when that young man grumbled, "I must have seen thirty of Dyer's cases if I saw one. Didn't Pussyface say which one it was?" "Better ask Miss Dean," Arthur Cook advised him, with cheerful malice. "She knows more about it than I do, I dare say. All Pussyface said to me was that it had been an emergency operation and he was out for your blood."

Dick was genuinely bewildered. He had been out from

two to four with Margery Brewster, chasing after the house in Friar's Entry, a vain and disappointing errand; and since he came back nobody had happened to speak to him about Mr. Dyer's case. "I never sent in any emergency," he protested, turning to the girl in the armchair. "It's the first I've heard of it. What's all this about, Miss Dean? What have I done now, I'd like to know?"

Arthur Cook watched the pair of them with bright interested eyes, while Sophia reluctantly laid down her paper. "We took in a cerebral abscess from Mr. Dyer's out-patients," she answered concisely. "It went into Mr. Groom's list for this afternoon; he did a decompression."

Dick stared open-mouthed. "I never saw any cerebral abscess, that I will swear," he began; then, with his jaw dropping and his eyes bulging with astonishment, he exclaimed suddenly, "I say, you can't mean that last case Sister brought in about lunch-time; a girl with a bad ear." "That's the one, I fancy," replied Sophia. "Sister Gater told us you'd seen the girl just before you went away." "Oh! come now, don't tell me she was a cerebral abscess," protested Dick, changing colour nevertheless as he struggled with his imperfect recollections of the case. "She couldn't have been, not possibly; there must be some mistake." "There wasn't any mistake about it when we got her on the table," Sophia told him wearily. "She was a cerebral abscess all right. I'm afraid you missed it." She was in no mood, apparently, for listening to Dick's evasions or excuses. She picked up the paper again while he glanced at her furtively out of the corner of his dark eye. He was still trying to preserve his air of careless good-humoured amusement, but it was wearing rather thin. "I say, Miss Dean," he appealed to her, "does my old man know I sent the girl away?"

Arthur Cook was listening with all his ears, enchanted by this encounter between the pair of them; but Miss Dean would not look his way. "I'm afraid he does," she admitted, keeping her eyes on the page. "You see, Sister Gater showed him the case-paper." "Oh, Lord, oh, Lord," grumbled Dick, rubbing his hands together and trying to laugh the thing off. "Isn't that just my luck, when I wanted him to be in a specially good temper for to-night? He'll make a hell of a row about it, I suppose." Arthur Cook could tell that he was extremely taken aback, from the way he stood there, shifting from one foot to the other, not knowing how to carry off the situation. Sophia gave him

no help. Arthur Cook completed and signed one form and began upon another. "Well, there isn't a thing I can do about it now," decided Dick, shrugging his broad shoulders. "Better get on up to Claypits, I suppose." He crossed the ends of his scarf, buttoned up his thick coat, took his hat and went away with a hangdog air to his engagement dinner.

When the door had shut behind him Arthur Cook laid down his pen, put his elbows on the table and remarked with amused satisfaction, "Old Groom won't be a bit pleased about this, will he? Our casualty officer really has put his foot in it this time. Unlucky for him you got on to it." He was all ready for a comfortable gossip and hoping for further information from Sophia, who had admitted the case. He was intensely annoyed when she only answered coldly, "I'd rather not talk about it just now. Talking won't do any good and Mr. Groom asked me not to let it get about." "It's got about all right, don't you worry!" retorted Arthur Cook, somewhat ruffled by her air of disapproval. "Why, half the hospital knows about it by this time. Sister Gater doesn't mean to let the story drop, if she can help it. She's had her knife into Groom for ages. I can tell you one thing, Miss Dean, he's finished as far as the R.S.O. job goes. The hospital board will never give him that appointment after this." His vexation overcome by his eager interest in the topic, he leant affably on the table expecting to break down her reserve; but Sophia astonished him by murmuring absently, "I suppose not, poor devil!"

Arthur Cook was quite bewildered. He opened his eyes wide and exclaimed, "You don't have to be sorry for him. Why, it'll do you all the good in the world! You'll get the job yourself now, for certain." "I wish you wouldn't talk like that," the girl retorted sharply. Her tone offended him; he muttered, "Oh, well, if you're going to take that line about it, I'd better shut up, I suppose," and to give himself countenance made a show of applying himself to his notes. Scribbling away irritably, he heard the girl murmur in apology, "I only meant that may be it wasn't altogether his fault. It's so horribly easy to make a mistake when you're tired or in a hurry." She added, after a pause, "It frightens me really to think how I might have done it myself."

She shivered a little, while Arthur Cook lifted his head and stared at her, wondering what on earth made her talk like that. There was no humility in him yet and he was still affronted by her rebuke. "I should hope I know my job well enough not to miss a cerebral abscess" said he and

returned to his papers with an air of virtuous disapproval. "If I don't get on with these," he muttered, "I shan't have them out of the way before the slut comes to lay the table." His pen scratched away and Sophia's paper rustled until the door opened, and the Czech doctor marched in, scattering a breath of the frosty night as he took off his many coats and scarves. "Where is Mr. Groom?" he demanded immediately, as his eye travelled from the notice-board to the two silent young people. He looked uncommonly vexed when Arthur Cook told him that Dick had gone out a quarter of an hour earlier. "Did you not give him my letter?" demanded the little angry man. "I wish to speak to him, he should have waited to see me." Arthur Cook, looking as if butter would not melt in his mouth, declared that Dick had been positively obliged to go out, but would be in by eleven.

6

Dr. Shoesmith had done a cold country round that afternoon, by Littlefold, Lambscot and the Sheepbridge Cottage Hospital, where he was consulting physician. He got some tea there out of the Matron, but he was chilled to the bone by the time he came home at six to his own house at the back of Saint Blazey's Church. Three generations of Shoesmiths had doctored the people of Wilchester from that address and it had an older medical association which pleased Dr. Shoesmith, for it had once been owned by that apothecary, James Butler, whose daughter had married Captain Ephraim Yeoman. It was properly styled Number Ten, Laystall Street, but was always called The Great House. It had a fine classical facade of the local crumbling yellow stone, with flat Corinthian columns rising the whole height of its three storeys to a pediment with a bull's-eye window in the middle; and there was some admirable carving of fruit and garlands round the doorway, which was approached by a flight of half-moon steps. Of course the house stood right on the pavement, in the noisiest part of the town and had been crowded in upon by later buildings; but it had preserved an unexpectedly large garden behind, with fig-trees trained upon its walls and a catalpa tree, traditionally brought back from across the Atlantic and planted by Captain Yeoman. Mrs. Shoesmith, an impassioned gardener, complained that the garden had more paving-stones than earth in it. What with the spreading drooping growth of the

catalpa tree and the height of the surrounding walls, she could get nothing to grow as it should.

Her old gardener had an allotment out at Claypits, where he grew the house vegetables and she fell back upon formal beds of irises, which rejoiced in the old mortar and stonework. Both she and the doctor were very learned in alpinism. She also had a weakness for topiary work and had a collection of box and yew trees which she had clipped herself, in the likeness of ships, birds, and animal and human figures. There were two old lead cisterns filled with good country earth, often renewed, and in these she grew wallflowers and snapdragons for colour; that was the best she could manage.

Eleanor Shoesmith was a battered brown-faced woman, as thin as a rail and exceedingly untidy, with soft straying grey hair and a deceptive air of vague inquiry due to her short sight. Actually her peering faded blue eyes missed little that went on about her, and she continually delighted her husband by her pungent comments on the inhabitants of Wilchester and their doings. She came of an old eccentric local family, the Goshawks of Littlefold Manor; and though the last of the name had died and the house had been sold, she still retained an unconscious air of dignity and command which vexed her neighbours. Mrs. Groom, who never knew how to take her, used to complain irritably, "Eleanor Shoesmith is the only woman I know who can walk through the Beastmarket in a dirty mackintosh, with her old garden felt on the back of her head and a hole in her stocking, and still look like a duchess. I don't know how she does it." And she would usually conclude, "I can't stand the way she looks right through you as if she didn't know whether you were there or not." Mrs. Groom was one of the people who refused to admit that short sight and absence of mind accounted for Mrs. Shoesmith's unrecognising stare at them as she walked about the town. The whole Groom faction wrote her down as proud and patronising; other people merely said, "She's a bit mad, of course, but you can't help liking her." Mrs. Shoesmith was an intellectual creature, who shared her husband's antiquarian tastes to the full and wanted little company but his. The two of them had had a long, happy and industrious married life, had put out three sons into the world and were now settled down together in amity to enjoy their old age as far as the war would permit.

There had been a notable skirmish between Mrs. Groom and Mrs. Shoesmith over the elder lady's refusal to undertake any special form of war-work. Mrs. Groom and her friend

Mrs. Brewster had run round restlessly in the early part of the war, organising a number of local activities. "I feel we must all do everything we can," was Mrs. Brewster's cry, but Mrs. Shoesmith, with a vigorous shake of her untidy head had declared in her oddly determined fashion, "I'm too old for all that. I don't intend to knock myself up and land Tom with an invalid wife. I did my bit with the young ones in the last war. I'm going to spend this one seeing that Tom gets his meals," and to this resolution she kept. As time went on it involved her, as possibly she had foreseen, in a great deal of unaccustomed work in house, garden, allotment, hen-house and kitchen; besides keeping up her various peace-time activities over at the hospital. She had always run the Ladies' Guild, who did the linen-room mending, and had organised the shifts of voluntary workers who served in the out-patients' canteen. None of this grew any easier as the war went on and helpers were taken away, but Mrs. Shoesmith kept going, without any appearance of strain; and old Dr. Shoesmith kept going too, despite his age and the increasing amount of work which fell upon him.

Returning on this particular evening, in less good spirits than usual, he found his wife sitting by a log fire, in the little white-panelled study which they now used as their sitting-room, since the big drawing-room had been packed up in dust-sheets for the duration. She was knitting away at a fleecy rosy mass of rabbit-wool, a shawl for her latest grandchild, in a pattern of ferns and shells, and reading Smollett while she worked. She said, removing her owlsh horn-rimmed glasses, "You know, I find I like this man better and better. I used to think he was a coarse bore, but now I seem to have reached the age when I begin to appreciate him."

The doctor stood with his back to the fire warming himself, shivered, rubbed his bony hands together and cocked his eye at her book. "What have you got there? Oh! *Humphrey Clinker*; that's an easy one for a start. It's nothing but young men chasing heiresses about the country and old maids hunting husbands, a comical old man drinking the waters at Bath, Bristol or Harrogate, coachloads of plump ladies getting upset into rivers and ditches, and that pretty Welsh maidservant losing her petticoat in the hot springs at Bath. It's all gay and rollicking, like a Rowlandson drawing. Better see whether you've got the stomach for that floating hell of a ship; in *Roderick Random*, isn't it?" She replied, "For goodness' sake sit down and get properly warm after

that long drive ! Here's your soup ; don't say another word till you've drunk it." She always had a thermos full of soup waiting for him when he had been out on a long round ; and the two old people had their evening meal at seven, since nowadays Dr. Shoesmith had been obliged to take on again a task which he had given up six years earlier, the evening course of lectures for the nurses over at Yeoman's, who were studying for their final examinations. " I wish it wasn't one of your hospital evenings," complained Mrs. Shoesmith, anxiously watching him as he drank. " These lectures are too much for you, on top of a heavy day " ; but her husband only warmed his fingers on the big cup and replied, " It's worse for the girls than it is for me. Most of them have done a harder day's work than I have, and they don't always keep awake."

It was true that he looked pinched and drawn and had no colour in his face. She fancied that perhaps something had gone wrong with his afternoon ; but when he began to talk, after a little, everything seemed much as usual. He had collected some gossip for her, knowing that what she missed most in her war-time existence was getting about the country to see old friends. She knitted and listened with enjoyment. Littlefold came first and her old home of Littlefold Manor, now in the hands of Admiral and Mrs. Francolin. " This flu' epidemic's been hitting them pretty badly up the Dodder valley," related the doctor. " Siskin's run off his legs trying to get round his practice up in Lambscot and Littlefold. It's taking off the old people, he tells me ; they haven't the staying power." She asked how Mrs. Francolin was and Dr. Shoesmith grinned. " Nothing much wrong there ; no need for any consultation really, only Siskin's a fidgety chap, with no confidence in his own judgment, and the Admiral got into a state about his wife. Mrs. Francolin enjoys being ill, it's the best way she knows of getting attention, now that she's lost her looks. Women like that are the bulk of one's practice," said Dr. Shoesmith tartly. " I sometimes think Mrs. Francolin would be none the worse for taking her turn in an out-patient queue. They wanted me to take up a trained nurse for her from somewhere, but I had to tell them I couldn't manage it. With the present shortage, really serious cases have got to come first." " Of course that silly daughter of hers was never any use," mused his wife. " Her mother never let her do a hand's turn." " Well, Phyllis has been called up now," Dr. Shoesmith informed her. " She's in a government office somewhere, I wish them joy of her ;

though what use she'll be to her country I can't imagine." "They'll teach her to make a good cup of tea in Whitehall, I dare say," remarked Mrs. Shoesmith drily. "Who's nursing her mother while she's away? Have the Francolins got any servants? Mother always said you couldn't run that house under six; it's such a barrack."

"They've still got more than most of us," replied Dr. Shoesmith. "Two or three old age pensioners, though, I fancy, and nobody much to run up and downstairs. The Admiral opened the door to us himself. Siskin had to cut him off spending his nights with the river-patrol, because of his rheumatism, so he's been taking his turn. Sailors are always handy about a house. The Admiral's been doing most of the cooking, I hear, and quite fancies himself at it. That good soul, Kate Merlin, has been running over whenever she could, to nurse Mrs. Francolin; but she's got her own two girls in bed with flu' at the Old Rectory, so she can't do much. Still, Mrs. Francolin isn't a serious case. Colonel Heron's been much worse than she has. Siskin told me the old gentleman had had a pretty close shave. However, he's past the worst of it now; we shall pull him through. He's got an uncommonly strong heart for a man of his age and that Austrian wife of his has been a tower of strength; she's nursed him admirably. It was the best day's work he ever did when he married that woman."

Mrs. Shoesmith agreed warmly and inquired, with less enthusiasm, about Colonel Heron's sister. "I'm afraid she's getting better too," responded the doctor with regret. "Now there was a case Siskin might have let slip through his fingers and nobody would have shed a tear." Husband and wife laughed together. "It would take more than a few pneumococci to kill Mrs. Drake," lamented Dr. Shoesmith. "More's the pity!" He added another item of news from Lambscot, "Siskin says Dr. Raven from Wethercote has been quite a help to him this autumn, since he's been so busy." She objected, "I thought the man had retired years ago," and her husband agreed, "He had, practically; but he seems to have come out of his shell again lately. It waked him up a good deal when his daughter married that young airman. Camilla was away for a time last year, but now that her husband's gone overseas again she's back at Trafalgar Farm with the baby. He's a fine child, Siskin says, and his grandfather thinks no end of him. Yes, they're all over the worst of the epidemic now, up the Dodder valley. The only patient Siskin lost was old Miss Pigeon, down at Lambscot. She just

let go from the first, he says, and died in a couple of days. She hadn't any staying power; she never could get used to the war. At her time of life she couldn't look beyond it."

He had roused up and grown quite lively while he told his tale, but now he seemed to tire again, yawned wearily and sat gazing into the fire. His wife thought that he still looked too cold and pale and she did not like the way he kept on talking about the age of his different patients; it had seemed to crop up throughout his recital and it was not like him. Usually he was very cheerful on this subject, took a pride in his own years and maintained that most people let themselves grow old before their time. She felt more certain than ever that something had gone wrong, at some time in his doctor's day, but could not make out where. Perhaps it had been during his hospital morning. She had not seen him at lunch-time, because it had been one of her days for the midday shift at the canteen. "How did the board meeting go off?" she inquired, while her needles looped their way along the edge of the rosy shawl. "Did you get things fixed up about Miss Dean's appointment?" Unlike Mrs. Groom, the devoted woman prided herself on knowing everything that went on down at Yeoman's Hospital. She had thought to encourage her husband by speaking of something agreeable; to her surprise and vexation he shook his old head mournfully and told her, "I'm afraid that's all off."

"Oh, dear, what a disappointment!" exclaimed Mrs. Shoesmith, laying down her work. "What happened? couldn't you get the board round to it? I thought the whole business was going so well." Dr. Shoesmith shrugged his broad shoulders, "I could have handled them," said he carelessly. "Groom's backing his boy, of course, and Brewster's with him, and the Mayor brought out some old-fashioned scruples about having a woman on the job; but I could have dealt with them all right. No it's the girl herself, Eleanor; she's in two minds about taking it."

"Why, I thought it was all settled," his wife protested. "I thought she wanted it so much." "Well, she's changed her mind, that's all," said old Tom crossly. "This morning she was right up in the air about a new plan of going back to London." He moved his great bulk fretfully in his chair.

"How exceedingly tiresome of her!" said Mrs. Shoesmith crisply. "I shouldn't have thought she was the kind to chop and change like that. She always seemed to me such a sensible young woman." She had entertained Sophia Dean on various occasions, since she liked to show kindness to the

strange young men and women who found themselves in the residents' quarters at Yeoman's Hospital, and had thought the girl handsome, intelligent and well-mannered.

"I don't know that one can blame her," sighed old Tom. "She's an ambitious capable creature and it seems she's got the offer of a pretty good post. They're setting up a new orthopædic clinic at St. Catherine's and she could get on to it for the next three years. She thinks it might lead on to a consulting practice, Harley Street and so forth; you could hardly expect her to turn down a chance like that, even if it is a bit of a gamble, for the sake of sticking all her days in a place like Wilchester." He gazed sadly into the fire.

"Wilchester is a very good place to spend one's life in," maintained Mrs. Shoesmith, who had done that very thing herself, "and Yeoman's is a very good hospital. She'd get better opportunities here than she ever would up in London. No need for her to turn up her nose at us. I don't wonder you're disappointed, my poor dear. Why, you've been moving heaven and earth to work it for her." "I might have saved myself the trouble," old Tom replied. "I shan't do anything more about it. Dick Groom can have the job, for all I care."

His wife did not like this listless manner of accepting defeat before it came, it was so unlike Tom not to go on fighting to the end of a battle. She wondered in her practical way whether he might not be sickening for influenza himself; but he did not look flushed or feverish, only intensely discouraged, as he stared mournfully at the glowing coals. "I hear the Brewsters have announced the engagement," said she, picking up her work again, smoothing it out and examining the corner critically. The shells and ferns intersected there in a complicated pattern, she was forced to count stitches for a minute or two while her husband mused, "Well, Margery Brewster is a plain girl, but she's got plenty of character, she'll keep young Groom on the rails if anybody can."

Mrs. Shoesmith murmured absently, "That'll take a bit of doing," while her lips moved in silent calculation; but her husband shook his white head. "Master Dick knows which side his bread's buttered as well as any man," was his opinion. "We shan't hear of any more hospital flirtations after this. He'll settle down into a model husband, and I dare say he'll work up quite a decent practice in time. Of course he'll never be the man his father is; he'll always scamp his work and cut corners, but plenty of people in

Wilchester will be perfectly satisfied with his performances." "He'll kill a few people before he's through," prophesied Mrs. Shoesmith, who could not abide Dick Groom; but her husband only shrugged his shoulders and quoted one of his classical proverbs, "When a doctor makes a cure, the sun sees it; when he makes a mistake, the earth hides it." "Well," sighed Mrs. Shoesmith, "I must confess I'm disappointed that we're going to lose that Dean girl"; and as her needles gathered speed on the plain edge, with the corner safely turned, she murmured, "I wonder how Neil will get on without her."

7

If she had wanted to rouse her husband from his mournful staring at the fire, she succeeded admirably. He sat up straight, heaved his bulk round so that he faced her directly and drew his bushy white eyebrows together. "What makes you say that?" he demanded irritably. "What's it got to do with Neil?" and as she continued placidly with her knitting burst out, "I'll swear I never said anything to you about the pair of them. This is some hospital gossip you've picked up."

"No, dear; it wasn't you," his wife agreed. "It was somebody from Yeoman's I fancy, who hinted they might be going to make a match of it; Captain Chandler, perhaps when he was here for Sunday supper, or Mrs. Brewster trying to pass on something she'd got hold of from Sister Priest, one day last summer when we were at the canteen. I didn't take much notice of it at the time and I heard no more about it. There's always some story or other going the rounds at Yeoman's and I do try not to listen, or pass them on. Most of them are smoke without fire, of course." She looked up over her owlish glasses and met her husband's eye. He groaned, "I'm not at all sure there mayn't be some fire in this one. It's queer you should speak of it to-day, Eleanor; I've had it in my head ever since I saw the girl this morning, something peculiar about the way she looked or spoke of him made me think there might be trouble blowing up between them. Old people get these fancies, of course; very likely there's nothing in it. I hope I'm wrong. I've no wish for Neil to marry her."

"Well, you surprise me, Tom," Mrs. Shoesmith declared. "I thought you had such a high opinion of her. You always say you like a girl who knows her own mind. And," she added slyly, "I thought that was why you married me."

"It was one of the reasons," he admitted, with a smile,

"but you knew how to play your hand better than this girl does. Upon my soul, she takes my breath away sometimes. She's so confoundedly cool and so sure of herself. Underneath that pretty polite manner she's as hard as nails. If she were to take the bit between her teeth there'd be no stopping her. This chance of going to London, you know, she was on to it at once. You should have seen her face when she talked about it."

"Neil wouldn't care about going back to London," said Mrs. Shoesmith thoughtfully. "He told me only the other day how much he liked living in Wilchester. He said all he cared about was a quiet life and this was the place to find it. Security, he kept on telling me, that was what he wanted." And she added thoughtfully, smoothing and pulling out her work, "I thought at the time it was a queer word for a young man to use. It isn't natural for him to be so ready to settle down. He ought still to be running about after every new thing."

"I've never understood how he came to lose his job at St. Catherine's," her husband sighed. "We were all so proud of him when he got it, I thought he was a made man with his career before him. I was never so disappointed about anything in my life as I was when he wrote to say he'd thrown up his post. I haven't got to the bottom of it yet. He won't talk about it and everybody up there is too discreet to tell me, but he must have had some frightful row with the authorities, or they wouldn't have let him go so easily."

"That disagreeable manner of his is a great handicap to him," reflected Mrs. Shoesmith. "He bites your head off before you can begin to make friends with him. I don't pay any attention to him, because I'm used to him; but strangers won't put up with it and after all why should they?"

"He gets that from his father," said Dr. Shoesmith and his face set into its heaviest lines. "If ever there was a cantankerous, quarrelsome, arrogant fellow, it was Sidney Marriner. Nobody had a good word for him when he was alive and very few people can have regretted his death."

"I never could understand how your sister came to marry Professor Marriner," agreed Mrs. Shoesmith. "He really was a detestable man," and her husband sighed, "Oh! poor Ailsie, she was fascinated by his intellect. He was a clever beast, of course, and she thought he was brilliant; he was supposed to have a great future before him. We all begged her not to marry him, but she would do it, there was no stopping her. She wouldn't listen to any one."

"I only saw him once or twice," recollected Mrs. Shoesmith in her soft voice, "when you and I were first married. I shall never forget how rude he was to me. After that the two of them went off to live in the North of England and I'm thankful to say I never saw him again."

Dr. Shoesmith nodded. "It's my belief," he declared, "that Marriner took his professorship at that frightful red-brick university simply and solely in order to get Ailsie away from her family. He was an underbred thin-skinned fellow, always on the look-out for slights. Ailsie was loyal enough, poor dear! she wouldn't hear a word against him, but he knew well enough that we grudged her to him. Ah, well! they didn't have long together. It was the nineteen eighteen flu-epidemic that was the death of Marriner. I was saying to 'Siskin, only this afternoon, if we'd had the sulphonamides then, we could have saved most of our patients. As it was, people died like flies; I shall never forget it." He sighed and shook his head while Mrs. Shoesmith declared stoutly,

"Your sister was well rid of him."

"She had a desperate struggle bringing up those three boys of hers," declared Dr. Shoesmith. "How she did it I don't know. She wore herself out, poor dear! she turned into an old woman before her time, slaving away in one teaching post after another, first to keep a roof over the boys' heads and then to educate them and set them out in the world. I helped her as much as she's let me, but she was such a proud stubborn creature, you couldn't give all you'd like." He leant his head on his hand, while his wife said gently, "I've always thought she did a wonderful job with those boys."

"Yes, Ailsie managed to give all three of them a good start," Dr. Shoesmith agreed. "Dick's doing uncommonly well with that fruit farm of his outside Vancouver, and Jimmy's fixed for life, I suppose, now he's got his job with those oil-people; a research chemist can always make his way. Neil was the one she thought the most of; he was always her favourite and of course he was the cleverest of the three. Maybe she spoilt him a little, but she always said he'd go a long way. I wish she'd lived to see him qualified." He sighed deeply, thinking of his brilliant only sister, worn out and dead before her time, who seemed forgotten by almost every one but himself. "What a vivid creature Ailsie was!" murmured his wife. "I don't think I ever met any one who was quite so much alive."

"Ah! you didn't know her when she was young," said Dr. Shoesmith. "She was astonishing then, sweet and gay

and full of sap, like a young tree ; in those days the sky wasn't tall enough for her to walk under. We all thought she'd do great things. Most of that beauty and courage was battered out of her afterwards, she turned into a hard, haggard creature, fighting tooth and nail for those boys of hers. She gave up everything for them ; her life was wasted." "She didn't think so," Mrs. Shoesmith replied gently. "Women don't, you know. She felt that she'd accomplished her life's work. She told me that, just before she died." And she added, after a pause, with some hesitation, "This girl over at the hospital, Miss Dean, reminds me a little of your sister."

Dr. Shoesmith first looked startled, then admitted, "I know what you mean. I expect it's the red hair. She's not like Ailsie in looks, of course, but she's got the same confidence and courage. She gets her teeth into life as Ailsie did. You can't teach her anything ; she will go her own way, however upsetting it is to other people. Ailsie was like that, she couldn't take time to be lazy, she must always be reaching out for something better. Yes, there is a likeness, though I hadn't thought of it before. Maybe that's why I like the girl, maybe that's what Neil admires in her, if there is anything between them. She's a most uncomfortable creature ; not at all the sort of wife for Neil to my mind."

Mrs. Shoesmith replied crisply, "Neil's his mother's son. He'll probably need something more out of life than mere comfort, in the long run."

She arrested her husband's attention, as she always could do when she chose. He objected, "I've always thought the boy should marry some girl like a cushion, who'd soothe him and take the edge off life for him" ; but Mrs. Shoesmith would not agree. "Neil's working through a queer phase just now," she declared shrewdly. "There's some sort of reaction going on in him. You know, Tom, he's seen more trouble than most young men of his age. He's come up the hard way, he's never known anything but struggle and disappointment, he's had to fight for all his advantages. He adored that mother of his, and she died just when their life was getting a little easier. He is cursed with this frightful temper and it makes enemies for him wherever he goes. He's been hurt pretty badly, somehow or other. He's had some big disappointment and now he's gone right back into his shell. He's afraid of life, to my mind, he's afraid of people. I don't suppose it'll last. He'll pull himself together presently and make a fresh start. After all, the boy's not thirty." To

her comfortable grandmotherly eyes that was no great age.

Her husband admitted, "You may be right," but his brow remained fixed. "I don't suppose we shall keep either of them," he sighed. "Neil's too good for this place and so's the girl, if it comes to that. She'll run off to London and drag him there after her, I shouldn't wonder." Mrs. Shoemsmith told him cheerfully, "Now, my dear, you know you don't think anybody too good for Yeoman's," but he only retorted bitterly, "I'm an old fool about the place. No need to remind me of that. It's because I've spent my whole life in it, and don't know anything better. When that girl was talking to me this morning it all came over me pretty plainly. Yeoman's is just an old-fashioned, out-of-date provincial hospital, more dead than alive. It can't go on in its present form, it's only fit to be pulled down and swept away. She showed me that, by the way she spoke of it. She was polite enough, in her pleasant way, said she was grateful for my interest and all that, but I could see she didn't think it was worth her while to stay here. I shan't lift a finger to keep either of them, Eleanor; I haven't the right to expect these young people to waste their lives down here at Yeoman's. It's no use any more and I'm no use either."

Mrs. Shoemsmith was really worried by his melancholy air, she did not know what more she could do or say to cheer him. She was thankful when the door opened and their old grey-headed maid came in with the dinner tray. "My poor dear!" said she, rising and putting away her work, "you're worn out. You'll feel better when you get some food inside you." There was luckily a better meal than she could always provide. The brown casserole had a jugged hare in it, probably poached, but a grateful patient had brought it in from the country on market day; there were plenty of savoury herbs and onions in the pot and a tart, made from her own greengages, to follow it. She made him drink a couple of glasses of wine; the Great House cellars were getting empty, but they would last his time. She told him every cheerful circumstance that she could recollect, from her own busy day and watched a little colour trickle back into his cheeks. It vexed her exceedingly that he should have to turn out again into the frosty night and toil over to hospital for the nurses' lecture; but she warmed his big coat and gloves thoroughly at the fire and wrapped him up in them before he went. "Ah, my dear," said the old man, teasing her, "what Neil wants is a wife like you to fuss over him, but there isn't another in the world, I'm afraid." She kissed

him and told him comfortably, "Neil will know what he wants when his time comes. There's no need for you to worry about Neil."

CHAPTER TEN

I

OVER in the Ferriman Home, at past seven in the evening, the Home Sister unlocked the night nurses' corridor, and Tilly the maid went down it, banging lustily on each door and chanting, "Time to get up, nurse." The night staff dragged themselves yawning out of their warm beds, fumbled into their uniforms and went up sleep-walking to the meal they called breakfast; for them the new day was just beginning. They sat yawning in a row at the table laid for them in the corner, without much appetite at that hour for stiff porridge and gritty coffee. They were quite a small party; a probationer for each of the seven wards and one for casualty, a staff-nurse between each two wards, a couple of senior nurses for Chamberlayne, where the labour-ward usually turned night into day; the home sister with her sharp monkey-face, watching every mouthful to be sure they ate a good enough meal to work upon and Sister Mercer, the Night Sister, that tall, handsome pale-faced old woman, with her fine dark blue eyes, her classic features and the ripple of snow-white hair under her cap. There was a calm and rather terrifying air about this woman with the face of an antique cameo; she had been at Yeoman's longer than any other sister except Sister Abbot, and for the last three years she had been on night duty. She was getting rather hard of hearing, and though she was an admirable nurse, she preferred her midnight quiet to the scurry and troublesome bustle of the wards in the day time. The nurses liked her, but were all a little afraid of her; they said behind her back, that after being so long on night duty she was a bit queer, not quite like other people. Besides you had to say things twice to her and then she did not always catch what you meant; but she was, of course, a wonderful nurse.

Breakfast swallowed, the probationers collected the billycans of food for the night from the kitchen next door; they wrapped themselves in their big red cloaks and picked up their despatch cases, with knitting, magazines and chocolate to while away the small hours. Then they all trooped down

the stairs, and out across the courtyard. There was no fog to-night to sting eyelids and noses, but it was a hard frost ; the night sky was powdered with innumerable shuddering stars, and there was ice on the puddle by the side door, where a leaky pipe had dripped all day on the asphalt. Somebody slipped on it and nearly fell ; somebody else stopped and broke the ice with a delighted scrunch, another cried, " Oh ! do look at that shooting star. Wish, everybody," and they all laughed like a pack of children. The Night Sister, coming last, said " Hurry up, girls ; get in out of the cold or you'll catch your deaths," and they all crowded in to the warm silent hospital, to the long dim corridors with their blue overhead lights, to the darkness and the green-shaded lamps of the quiet wards. In the ward kitchens they hung up their frosted cloaks, took off their cuffs, straightened their caps and grumbled to the day staff, " Lord ! it's going to be cold, you're lucky not to be on night duty. Bed's the best place this weather."

The Night Sister had her round to do, taking a report from the sister of each ward before she went off duty. It was all much the same as it had been the night before ; a few new cases had come in, a few old ones gone away to a convalescent home or to their own. In Harvey one of the pneumonias was worse ; in Linacre two of them were getting better. In Jenner the diphtheria scare was off again ; the throat that had worried Mr. Cook was improving and the swab had come back negative from the laboratory. " Thank Heaven for that !" said Sister Jenner. " He might have thought of it before he admitted the child." In Chamberlayne the Sister in charge had just finished teaching one of the pupil-midwives how to deliver a child. " That wasn't too bad, at all, at all," said she in her loud Irish voice, " but you should have kept the head back a little longer ; however, there's no harm done to be sure. Tie off the cord, now, as quickly as you can and then put your hand where mine is." She nodded over her shoulder at the Night Sister as she concluded, " That wasn't an easy one for a start, let me tell you. I'll be with you in a minute, Sister, when we have all straight here." She was a big motherly Dublin woman, very strong, rough and capable, who must always have her joke ; the patients and the nurses all liked her. She rolled down her sleeves in a minute or two and came out into the ward, with the newborn child in her arms. " That woman gave us a bit of trouble," said she, " and the baby isn't in too good shape either. I'd say it ought to be baptised."

Sister Mercer picked up the little creature, which lay white and quiet in her arms and looked round for water. One of the younger nurses brought it in a bowl. "What is the father's name?" asked Sister Mercer, but the Irish woman replied with one of her queer looks. "There's nobody here could tell you that, not even the mother, I fancy": so Sister Mercer dipped her fingers in the water saying, "*John, I baptise thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.*" That was what was always done when there was no time to spare; a girl would have been Mary. The feeble thing sneezed like a kitten, when her wet fingers touched its forehead, and opened its eyes for the first time. She worked over it for a little time with the young nurse, rubbing and warming it, doing what she could to reconcile it to life, while the Irishwoman went back to see to the mother; presently she decided, "I think it's going to live." Sister Chamberlayne, returning, said, "I'm much obliged to you, my dear; you came just when I needed you. There's another woman here might keep me out of my bed till midnight, and I've three of my girls out in the town; otherwise we're much as usual. If you're not too busy, come for a cup of coffee after supper." The two of them were old friends.

Returning from Chamberlayne down the long passage Sister Mercer went up to Syme and Lister. In Syme, the women's surgical, they had still got their policeman on duty. Sister Mercer saw the gleam of his silver-bright buttons in the corner by the doorway. He was supposed to sit by the bedside of the woman who had tried to kill herself by drinking disinfectant, but as she was still unconscious after her operation there was nothing at all for him to do. Nobody wanted him there, and the sight of him kept the other patients awake. The poor wretch was horribly bored and spent much of his four hours on duty drinking cups of tea in the kitchen. "I wish they'd let him go home to his bed," said Sister Syme. "After all, she can't try it again in here." The worst case they had in there was a new one, Mr. Groom's cerebral abscess, snoring heavily behind the red screens. "She'll pull through all right," Sister Syme considered, "but it was a mercy Sister Gater spotted her in time. Did you hear what a fool young Mr. Groom made of himself about her?" Sister Mercer, just risen from her bed, of course had not yet heard this bit of hospital scandal and shook her deaf head over it soberly. "That young man won't ever be any good," was her verdict. "His mind's not on his work."

In the entry outside the Sister's office the girl's parents sat

waiting, the man with his elbows on his knees and his cap in his hands, staring at the floor, the little birdlike woman gazing nervously all round her. These classic attitudes of grief and fear had grown familiar to the two sisters through years of hospital work, but were still strangely moving, like a group of antique statuary. Sister Mercer spoke to them both as she went by, urging them to go home. The girl was comfortable, but would not be likely to wake or speak before morning, and there was nothing more that her father or mother could do for her.

Across the landing, in Lister, all their beds were full. They had three operation cases, but there was only one on the danger-list, Pedlar the shepherd from Ramscote. "He's pretty bad now," said Sister Abbot, looking tired; "however, you'll see how he gets through the night. Miss Dean will be round again presently to look at him, he's to keep on with the drip-saline. She's set her heart on his pulling through. Did you hear that Mr. Groom let her do half the operation? Theatre Sister says she did it very nicely. Yes, it was a carcinoma all right, but they hope they got it all away." Night Sister nodded, feeling the man's pulse. It was very feeble, and his skin was cold and damp, his face had fallen in till it looked the face of a very old man. "He'll need watching," said the Night Sister. "All right, we'll keep an eye on him. Who's the nurse in this ward? Oh yes, Nurse Fisher; she's one you can trust." "There's nobody else to worry about," said Sister Abbot. "Even Burgess in the corner seems to have picked up and taken a turn for the better. That new boy with the broken ankle was a little restless earlier on; children always hate their first night in hospital, don't they? Don't be surprised or think he's feverish if he talks about a rabbit. Sister Gater told me at dinner that he had a rabbit in his pocket when the lorry knocked him down. It gave them all quite a turn in casualty when Miss Dean fished it out. He's a dear little boy, he won't give you any trouble. His mother's been and gone; she was a bargee's wife off one of those china-clay barges in Canal Basin. The barge has gone down the river; they'll be back for the boy next week. A queer life for a child, you'd think, but the nurses say he was chattering away about what fun it was living in a cabin. Where he gets his schooling I can't imagine. Pedlar's wife is in the kitchen; I've told her she can stay the night as he's so bad and she lives so far away."

They went into the bright warm kitchen, and there was

the shepherd's little old wife, sitting staring in front of her, but she jumped up at once when the two women came in. She knew the Night Sister and begged her immediately, "Please, sister, may I go back and sit beside him? I don't like to think of him being there alone." The Night Sister exchanged a glance with Sister Abbot, who said pleasantly, "Now, Mrs. Pedlar, you'll be warmer in here, you know, than in the ward. It would be better for you to take a little rest while you can. He doesn't know that you're here yet, and you mustn't touch him or talk to him. You can trust us to let you know if there's any change in him, can't you?" But the little old woman, nodding her head and twisting her wrinkled hands together, still implored them, "Oh! please let me sit beside him," so in the end they agreed.

Last of all Sister Mercer went over to Sydenham, which was down a corridor of its own, a little away from the other wards. Sister Priest was fussing and fidgeting about as usual, but though she took longer to give her report than any of the others, there really was little to worry over; just some four-hourly treatments and feeds. She had, however, one patient who was dying, the unknown sailor in the corner, who would scarcely last the night. He lay with his head turned sideways on the pillow, breathing heavily and with a strange uncanny rhythm, rising to a climax and dying away; and his eyes were fixed already in a peculiar stare, his fingers were restless on the sheet. "You haven't found out anything more about him?" inquired the Night Sister, and Sister Priest shook her head. "He got restless and talked a bit this afternoon," she reported. "Nurse Gow thought she heard him say something about his name, but she couldn't make it out."

"I've been thinking about him ever since he came in," said Sister Mercer. "I believe his name is Poticary." "That's a queer name," said Sister Priest, who was not a Wilchester woman by birth, and had only come to Yeoman's to be near her cousins, the Brewsters. "It used to be a fairly common name round here," said the Night Sister, calmly. "There was a whole family of them over at Nether Barton when I was a girl, but they've pretty well died out. This would be William Poticary, I think. I knew him when I was quite a child, if it is him. He ran away to sea."

As if her clear voice had reached his ears the man moved his head from side to side and his eyes rolled. A faint sound issued from his pale lips, but neither woman could make out what he said. Sister Mercer went up to the bed, stooped over the dying man and called him by that name, while her long

fingers imprisoned his groping hand ; but though he opened his eyes and fixed them for a moment upon her, his eyelids drooped again and he did not speak. She gave him a searching look, but got no further response from him, with a sigh she straightened her back and walked away. " I don't know whether it could be William Poticary," she said. " This man has a look of him and of his old father too ; but after all these years I can't be sure. Men come back sometimes when everything else is finished, to the place where they were born ; but I don't know, I can't tell." " Well," said Sister Priest fretfully, " it doesn't really matter who he is ; he'll be gone by morning."

2

The Matron had eaten her supper long ago and was reading the *Nursing Mirror* before going to bed. Over in his own house Captain Chandler was going through the accounts and wondering how the new Government or Beveridge proposals would affect the hospital contribution scheme ; people wouldn't pay for the same thing twice over. In the Sister's sitting-room Sister Linacre was writing a letter to the man she was going to marry and Sister Gater was retelling the story about Dick Groom to Sister Harvey and Sister Chamberlayne ; they were all three smoking and yawning comfortably as they picked the bones of the day's work. It was past nine and down in the lecture theatre Dr. Shoesmith was more than half-way through his lecture to the third-year nurses. Pain was his subject to-night and the various nursing procedures for its relief. He tugged at his Father Christmas beard as his habit was when he spoke in public ; and blinked affably at the rows of sleepy young faces in front of him. He wondered how much of what he was saying would stick in their memories. It was all wrong that they should have to listen to him at the end of a long day when they were aching with fatigue and dazed with hours of work. The room was warm, and the raised tiers of wooden benches were not particularly comfortable ; tired backs drooped and eyes took on a glazed stupor as he tried to make their faces come alive. " You will learn by experience not to judge the severity of a man's pain by the noise he makes. The man who is in real agony will not waste his breath by making complaints. When a short and severe attack of pain is over it leaves curiously little mark on a man's memory ; this is a merciful dispensation of Providence which you will

realise as you grow older. Long continued pain often strengthens the character of the sufferer to an astonishing degree; but some of its victims do of course deteriorate. They become domestic tyrants, the whole household is sacrificed to their good days and their bad days, they subside into a fretful state of self pity. Heaven save you from a patient like that!" So the old man murmured gently on, till checked by a quite enormous yawn and start from a sleepy girl in the back row. Then he smiled in his beard, turned round and began to write on the blackboard the doses of the chief narcotic drugs. If the girls had something to copy down into their notebooks they would perhaps stay awake more easily.

Over in the Ferriman Home the day nurses who had escaped his lecture were already going to bed. In the corridor where the seniors slept Nurse Gow came back from her bath, with her sponge and towel in the crook of her arm and her two sandy plaits hanging down over her serviceable grey merino dressing-gown, and called in for a gossip with Dolly Clark. Dolly was lying flat on her bed in a rose-red quilted satin dressing-gown, with her arms folded behind her dark head and a forbidden cigarette in the corner of her mouth. "Home Sister won't be best pleased if she catches you smoking in here," remarked Elspeth Gow, perching on the single uncomfortable chair. "She's been round the probationers' bedrooms again lately, they were telling me, hunting for cigarettes; it'll be our turn next, I'm thinking"; but Dolly, yawning and stretching as comfortably as a cat, replied, "It won't matter to me what she says, or how much of a fuss she makes. I'm leaving at the end of this month."

The Scots girl only said, "Is that a fact?" but her shrewd eyes considered Dolly carefully. There was an old offensive and defensive alliance between the two girls, dating from the time when they entered the training school together. It had always been an attraction of opposites, since each wanted something quite different from her profession, but they had held together for nearly four years. "Yes," said Dolly, blowing a cloud of smoke up to the ceiling, "I told Matron at lunch-time that I'd had enough of Yeoman's." She spoke calmly enough, but Elspeth, who knew most of what there was to be known about Dolly, could see that she was in one of her smouldering rages, ready for any folly. "What about the theatre job?" inquired Elspeth bluntly, wishing to be sure of her facts. "Didn't she say anything about that?" "It's to be advertised," said Dolly bitterly. "Sister Mercer's

to take it over as a stop-gap till they find the right person. Matron won't trust me to behave properly up there. She told me I hadn't enough sense of responsibility." Her imitation of Miss Barber's starched voice had some humour about it, but when Elspeth made a sound of vexation and concern, she got what an outside observer would have considered a most unfriendly look from Dolly. "Matron told me I could have your job if I liked," exclaimed Dolly, with the utmost contempt. "Catch me messing about in Sydenham with a lot of Dr. Shoesmith's old chronics, and being spied on and gossiped about by that idiot, Sister Priest. No, thank you ; it isn't my cup of tea and so I told her. I couldn't stand it for a week. You told me yourself that Sydenham was the worst-run ward in the whole hospital."

Elspeth, quite unruffled, agreed pleasantly, "I'm glad enough myself to be getting away from it." Dolly flung away her cigarette, sat up, swung her legs over the side of the bed and leant forward. "Where's she sending you?" she demanded with sudden suspicion. The Scots girl cast down her eyes and confessed, with a slight air of embarrassment, "I'm to be Acting Sister in Jenner while Sister goes on holiday." Dolly scowled, doubled her fist and thumped her pillow angrily, then flung herself back against it. "That's Matron all over," she complained. "She's the most unfair woman that ever lived. She knows you don't like surgical work and I do, so she puts you in Jenner and tells me to go to Sydenham, just to spite us." "It's only for a wee while," murmured Elspeth humbly. "I'm to go back to Sydenham after ; she promised me that." "Well, I hope she'll keep her promise," mocked Dolly. "Sooner you than me anyhow, I wouldn't be so keen on being harried and muddled about by old Priest ; even if I did want to keep on the right side of Matron." The Scots girl shrugged her thin shoulders and replied cannily, "I'm thinking Sister Priest won't be here much longer."

Dolly stared at her, got all the way with her calculation and exclaimed bitterly, "You are a clever devil, Gow. You sit there looking as if butter wouldn't melt in your mouth, and all the time you've got the whole crowd of them where you want them. You're Matron's pet, aren't you? Dr. Shoesmith eats out of your hand ; you'll step into old Priest's shoes when she gets the sack ; this time next year you'll be Sister Sydenham." Elspeth did not smile, but a faint sparkle of satisfaction appeared in her eye. "That would suit me fine," she admitted, and when Dolly exclaimed

"Do you mean to stick here all your life?" merely replied, "I never was one for changes." Dolly turned on her side and thumped the pillow again, but she did not seem able to make it comfortable. "Well, thank God I'm clearing out of Yeoman's," she declared. "You never get anywhere in nursing, if you don't keep moving and I shan't do any more good in this place. Matron's got her knife into me properly, she's made up her mind to stand in my light. She'll keep me out of any job that's going." "Well," said Elspeth a trifle dourly, "maybe she has her reasons for that." She had never concealed from Dolly her poor opinion of the recent affair with Dick Groom. Dolly had paid little attention while things were going well for her, but now she suddenly resented Elspeth's critical air. "I suppose you mean I've been making a fool of myself over Dick," said she, and when Elspeth did not reply, burst out, "It's all very well for you to sit there looking so superior. You wouldn't care if you never spoke to a man again, but I'm different."

Elspeth smiled for the first time, a calm amused smile. "Och! men," said she comfortably. "I never heed them." On this point the two girls would never agree; though each might openly despise the other's behaviour and perhaps envy her a little in secret. "You're lucky, aren't you?" mocked Dolly, leaning her head on her hand. "That'll save you a lot of trouble. Myself, I can't get on without 'em, but I suppose in the long run one man will do as well as another." And she added shrewdly, "I don't believe Matron cares what I do in my off-time. She just wants to get rid of me because I won't let her bully me." Elspeth shook her head at this and looked doubtful, but turned the conversation firmly to pretty Dolly's uncertain future. "If you're really leaving, Clark," said she—"and I'm not saying that I don't think you'd be best away from here—then you'll need to consider well what's to do next." Dolly was listless at first, leaning back on her pillow and declaring, "I don't care where I go or what becomes of me," but when Elspeth suggested, "You used to say you'd maybe take up private nursing in one of those big London homes," she retorted briefly, "No, thanks. I shouldn't get any kick nowadays out of carrying round trays and answering bells for rich old women." She stretched out her hand for another cigarette and when she had lit it declared, "I might as well see the world while I'm about it. I think I'll take a Service job and go abroad for the duration." The Scots girl looked at this from all sides and decided, "You might do worse," and Dolly perversely

grumbled, "You don't care how far off I go, do you?" Elspeth had never seen her cry; but to-night she had a look like a fretful disappointed child, flushed in the cheeks and damp about the eyelids, as if her angry tears were not very far away. The Scots girl did not intend to encourage this mood; Dolly would not easily forgive a friend who had watched her weeping over her defeat. "Och! I'll miss you sorely," said Elspeth, rising to her feet. "You know that well enough, but I want you to do what's best for yourself. And if you've no more to tell me, I'll away to my bed. I'm a wee bit tired to-night myself and that's a fact." She hesitated a moment, perhaps wishing to say something kinder, but Dolly, curling up against the pillow and letting the cigarette droop out of the corner of her mouth, shut her eyes and yawned, "Yes, it's been a hell of a day." There seemed nothing more for the Scots girl to do but to step out into the corridor and close the door with a neat professional click behind her.

3

Down on the next floor the younger nurses, released from work, were making a good deal more noise than their seniors, running up and down the corridor, dodging in and out of the steaming bathrooms, calling out to each other like schoolgirls with bursts of laughter, catchwords and familiar silly jokes in the short hour of freedom which remained to them before the home sister turned out the lights. Betty Carter dragged young Joan Shepherd into her bedroom to admire the cut of a new pair of green velvet slacks, bought in London on her last day off. All these young women had long tired of their feminine uniform, with its display of neat waist and slender ankle; off duty they wanted to look as different as possible. Nurse Miller indeed, drooping dolefully in the armchair, with belt and collar off, her frock unbuttoned and her feet in thick felt slippers, remarked, "I sh'd've thought you'd've bought a couple of pairs of silk stockings, Carter," but Betty replied briefly, "Silk stockings are old stuff; what a girl wants nowadays is to look neat behind." She peered over her shoulder with satisfaction at her mirror image. "I do wish they'd give us a bigger looking-glass," she grumbled. "I can't see half of myself in this one." She kicked off her shoes, plumped herself down cross-legged on the bed beside shy Joan, burrowed under the pillow and produced a bag of bull's-eyes. "Here, have one

of these," she offered hospitably. "I've got half my sweet ration still." Nurse Miller stuck one in her pasty cheek, mumbling greedily, "Oh, thanks most awfully, Carter. I could eat a pound of these, I'm always starving for sugar. My ration goes in a couple of days, I can't seem to save it, I like a real burst." Joan hung back, but Betty insisted, "Go on, I oughtn't to eat any. I'm putting on pounds and pounds in this place; it's all the stodge they fill us up with. It was suet roll again at lunch to-day; that's twice this week. I do wish Home Sister would think up something different. We never get stewed fruit nowadays or salad either. It's awful." "Well, there's a war on," yawned Nurse Miller. She felt the glands in her neck and groaned, "Oh! dear, I think I'm going to get another of my throats."

Betty yawned too, enormously, with the chronic fatigue of the hard-worked nurse, took another bull's-eye and pushed the bag across to Joan. "I'm dying for a cigarette, really," she lamented, "but it's too much fag to go all the way down to that awful sitting-room; besides, I'd have had to keep my uniform on. I do think they might let us smoke in our bedrooms." "They never will," said Miller gloomily, breathing peppermint. "I mean to say, even the staff-nurses can't, and the sisters only can if they empty their own ashtrays." "I'd like to see 'em at it," giggled Betty; then gazed round her bedroom, surveying with dissatisfaction the narrow iron bedstead, the fumed oak chest of drawers and washstand, the plain blue curtains and the unshaded electric light. "This place is exactly like a boarding-school," she grumbled, "and the rules are just as silly. No smoking, no reading in bed, lights out at ten-thirty and they won't even let you change the furniture round. I did want to alter this awful room, and put the bed by the window and have the looking-glass under the light, where I could see to do my hair, but Home Sister wouldn't let me. She said if everybody altered their rooms it would make too much work for the maids."

"Home Sister is a devil," lamented Miller, while young Joan sat listening round-eyed and drooping with sleep. "She won't even let you have a vase of flowers in your bed-room." "That doesn't cut any ice with me," said Betty briskly. "I get enough of swilling out those blasted vases when I'm on duty. Clark was on at me this morning because they weren't bright enough to please her. You know perfectly well, Miller, that Home Sister can't have the whole corridor smelling of dead chrysanthemums"; but the lumpish girl, drooping more than ever, persisted, "I do like a nice vase of flowers."

Then there was a tap at the door and in straggled Nurse Capper from casualty, yawning her head off. "Lord! I'm dead," she sighed, making a third on the bed and gratefully putting a bull's-eye in her cheek. "I was on night-duty till eight and I only got four hours in bed; then I had to get up and go down to casualty straight after lunch. These sickening changes every three months always seem to land me in trouble." She was still in her uniform, with a couple of notebooks under her arm, which she cast from her. "I shall never get through my final," she announced, "I shall flop, I know I shall. I do think they might find a better time for third-year lectures than nine o'clock at night. I like listening to Dr. Shoemith any other time, but to-night I simply didn't know how to keep awake. I dropped off and yawned right out in the middle of one of his best bits. Then I woke up again with a sort of a snort and the old boy glared straight at me. I'm certain he heard me, he never misses anything. I'm terrified of him, aren't you?" She undid her collar and pulled off her cap, looking immediately like a little girl.

"I'm not a bit frightened of old Tom," boasted Betty Carter. "I think he's a pet lamb, I do really. Now Mr. Groom makes me shake in my shoes. I must say I shan't be sorry when I've finished with him. He sort of looks at you as if you were a blackbeetle. What's it like down in casualty, Capper? I haven't been there yet, I'm about due for it, I expect, when I've done my time in Lister." "Oh! a bit of a rush," sighed Nurse Capper, yawning again. "You never know what'll turn up next. It's one down, t'other come on, the whole day long. The first thing that came in after I started was a boy who'd been run over, with a squashed rabbit in his pocket; you never saw such a mess in your life. I must say it did give me a turn. I squeaked out loud, I couldn't help it, and Sister gave me such a look."

Young Joan, whom every one had forgotten, exclaimed, "Then there was a rabbit after all," and blushed crimson when the other three girls turned to stare at her. "He was talking about it when I was washing him up in the ward," she explained timidly. "What ward's that?" asked Nurse Capper and when she was told "Lister," said, "Yes, I remember, he went up to Lister. There wasn't a bed in Jenner. So you're in Lister, are you?" "It's the poor kid's first day there," said Betty, grinning affably, "and she doesn't know whether she's on her head or her heels, do you, Shepherd?" while Joan blushed again. "Oh, it's hell when

you first start," agreed Nurse Capper with her brisk efficient air, "and don't I know it? You're in luck's way to be with Sister Abbot, though; isn't she, girls? I began in Sydenham; my God! what a ward! Old Priest is the limit; she doesn't know her own job and she's always in a muddle. Nothing's up to time in Sydenham; she won't leave you alone to get on with your work; she never stops nagging and she will keep pulling you off whatever it is you are doing, so as to shift you to something else. She's got no method."

Young Joan listened, awed and silent, while Betty Carter took up the tale. "What I can't stand about Sister Priest is the way she never will send you off duty at the proper time. When I was in Sydenham I was always getting into rows with Home Sister about being late for meals. If you ask old Priest to let you go punctually, ten to one she'll find you another job, and she's always changing your off-time without telling you beforehand. It's a shame, it is, really. Why, when I was in Sydenham she did the dirty on me twice that way, just because she'd got her time-table into a muddle. There was poor old Jim waiting about the hospital gates in the rain, and I couldn't even let him know I wasn't coming. Of course he thought I'd let him down on purpose, and I had to be twice as nice as I'd meant to be, next time we were out together, before I could get him into a good temper again."

She smiled comfortably at the recollection, while Nurse Capper, who had no young man to wait for her outside the gates of Yeoman's, said rather mournfully, "It's all very well for you to talk like that; you've got your home and your friends here. I haven't anything in particular myself to do when I get out of hospital. I don't know a soul in this place." "You can play tennis anyhow," suggested Betty Carter vaguely, but Nurse Capper was not enthusiastic. "I'm not all that keen on tennis," said she vaguely and Nurse Miller exclaimed feelingly, "Catch me playing tennis on their old court; when I get off duty, all I want to do is to give my feet a rest."

"Better watch out," said Betty Carter, rather unkindly, "or you'll get like Sister Priest. She hasn't got a friend outside Yeoman's, and half the time she stops on duty because she can't think of anything else to do. It used to drive Nurse Gow wild. She's keen, that girl, and she wanted her chance to run the ward; but old Priest would keep on pottering round, thinking something might go wrong without her; sometimes she wouldn't go off duty for days together. It's pretty dreary when you come to think of it. That's where you end up, I suppose, if you don't look out."

Nurse Miller squeaked, "Oh! don't say that; it would be too awful to get like Sister Priest"; but Nurse Capper shivered slightly, as if she saw something alarming ahead of her. "I'm frightened of that myself sometimes," she confessed and for a moment all the four young faces looked sober and perplexed. Then the light-hearted Betty Carter jumped up, shook herself and exclaimed, with cheerful ignorance, "Oh! we don't have to worry. Things are different nowadays. It won't happen to us. You want a good night's sleep, Capper; that's your trouble. Get off to bed, for goodness' sake! and you too, Miller, or you'll be late for breakfast." "If I'm late again," said Miller with gloomy satisfaction, "I'll lose my next late leave and have to make up the time on my half-duty day." "Well, for God's sake scramble," urged Betty, "or you'll have Home Sister turning the light out on you."

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I

THE DOCTORS' DINNER had been served at half-past seven, an uninteresting meal, shared without much conversation by the Resident Surgical Officer, Miss Dean and Mr. Cook. They were all three of them tired and out of humour; it was one of those evenings, thought Sophia, when the communal life seemed particularly dreary. After dinner the little Czech doctor plumped himself down with a book before the gas fire and Arthur Cook escaped, with a muttered excuse about writing letters. His bedroom happened to be the one next the linen cupboard and it was several degrees warmer than the others. Sophia could not face her own cold room, which looked north over the courtyard and had two outside walls. She fidgeted about, not knowing what to do with herself until it was time to go up to the wards for her evening round. She was supposed to be off-duty from five till nine, but that extra case in the theatre, and the plaster after it, had kept her so late that it had not been worth going out. That often happened on operating days. She had had no fresh air all day long, she had not put her foot outside the hospital gates. Of all that winter weather she had seen nothing but the morning fog, blanketing the ward windows, the gulf of blue sky outside Neil's window at midday, the

rich yellow gleam of the sunset reflected from the tiled theatre walls, and a handful of frosted stars overhead, an hour earlier, as she crossed the courtyard to visit a sick nurse in the Ferrihan Home. She had a sudden claustrophobic feeling of being shut up in a box. Yeoman's Hospital was like a ship or a prison, a world enclosed; once you were in it you soon began to forget that there was anything outside.

She was tired out; her legs and back ached with long standing, her muscles were stiff from want of proper use, her head felt stupid with the steamy heat of the theatre and the gas-dried air of this stuffy room. She would have liked to go out for a four-mile walk, but there was no chance of that, with the black-out turning Wilchester town into a maze of darkness. She could settle to nothing. She smoked one cigarette after another, filled in a couple of forms and wrote up two case-papers. Finally she sat herself down in the second of the two slippery black leather arm-chairs before the hearth, resolutely determined to read the *Lancet* until it was time for the nine o'clock news; but it was no use. She could not fix her mind on the deliberations of her profession about its own future. She read the same paragraph over and over again, but it conveyed nothing to her mind. She put the paper down on her knee, held up her thin hand between her face and the glowing fire and began to worry about the afternoon's work.

She was anxious about Pedlar, the shepherd from Ramscote. She went over the steps of his operation again and again in her mind, visualising one anatomical detail after another, wondering whether they had got the whole growth completely away, or whether there still lurked in some deep pocket, high up under the man's ribs, a fragment of tissue, a hidden gland, a cluster of malignant cells which would presently begin to grow again, spreading quietly like a fire in rotten wood to consume the whole of his being. She wanted passionately to be assured that Mr. Groom and she had made a clean job of the case, but you could not hope to be certain of that for months yet. She knew that she had done her own part very carefully, but even so there was always the odd chance of a stitch cutting through the soft tissues before they had time to heal, a leak at the join she had made. She knew perfectly well that it was stupid of her to waste her time and strength worrying over what was finished and done with. That was one of the first lessons you had to learn in hospital, if you worried about your cases you were no good. Women did it more than men, that was one of the

reproaches made against them. She had always vowed that she would not let herself fall into the habit and despised herself when she did, but on this particular evening she could not break the futile chain; it went round and round like a creaking wheel in her head. She moved restlessly in her uncomfortable seat, rubbed her tired eyes with her fingers, uncrossed her feet, dropped her paper from her knee and knocked down the ashtray from the arm of her chair. It fell with a clatter into the fender. "What is the matter with you?" demanded the little Czech doctor angrily.

Sophia had almost forgotten that he was there, he had not opened his mouth for half an hour, but had sat huddled together, with his eyes obstinately glued to his book. She jumped when he spoke to her, said hastily, "There isn't anything the matter, sir," and coloured up to her forehead. He stared at her with his bright unwinking catlike eyes. "You mean you do not choose to tell me," he grumbled. "Well, that is your business, but it is stupid of you to think that you can deceive me. Of course there is something the matter. I have sat here for half an hour, trying to read my book and all that time you have been thinking of something which does not please you. You pretend to read your paper, but you do not turn over the page. You look into the fire, you move about in your chair, you sigh to yourself and then you rustle the paper and light yourself another cigarette; but you are never quiet. All the time you disturb me," complained the little man, in his high fretful foreign voice. "I cannot read my book."

Sophia replied stiffly, "I'd better go upstairs," and drew in her feet to get up from her chair, but he shook his head at her vigorously. "No, no," he told her, "you shall not do that. There is no fire in your bedroom and the hot-water pipes are not hot to-night. I know; I felt them. It is too cold to sit upstairs; otherwise," said he simply, "I should be upstairs myself. I do not like it down here, I am always too much interrupted." She could not, after all, be angry with the little man, he was as frank and greedy for his own comfort as a child. "Really, I'm sorry," said she in her polite and charming voice. "I forgot you wanted to read. I'll go up to Lister Ward. I've an operation case there I'd like to have a look at, I want to see how he's getting along." The R.S.O. blinked crossly at her. "What case is that?" he demanded, and when she told him, "The first one we did this afternoon; the carcinoma," persisted, "There is no need for you to disturb the nurses now. The operation is

finished, you have ordered what treatment he should have, you should trust the nurses to carry it out. You can do nothing more for him if you go up to the ward. Is it of that man you are thinking, when you fidget and rustle the paper so that I cannot read my book in peace?" Sophia nodded reluctantly and he burst out in his scolding voice, "You should not be so foolish. It is one of the first things you must learn, not to look back on what is finished. If the man lives, he lives and if he dies, he dies; if he does not die now he will die next month, or next year, or ten years from now. You cannot alter that with your thinking." He looked more like an angry cat than ever, with his untidy grey hair all pushed up on end and his bright eyes staring at her. She pleaded; "I keep on wondering whether we got a complete removal," and he retorted, "What has that to do with you? That was not your work, Mr. Groom did that. Your part was well done, I saw it myself, it could not have been better. Mr. Groom thought so too. He was pleased that you did it so prettily."

Sophia looked up and opened her mouth to contradict him, but the little man would not let her speak. "He thinks you are clever," said he, watching her as intently as a cat at a mousehole. "I said to him, 'You are giving Fraulein much work to do to-day,' and he answered, 'She must have practice if she is to take your place when you go.'" Sophia coloured right up to her forehead, she was so astonished that she could not speak. "Ah! that surprises you, perhaps," said the little man, spitefully enjoying her confusion. "It surprised me, too; I could not think that he meant it. He has always hoped that his son would come after me, but to-day something has happened to change his mind. You know what it is, perhaps." He looked at the girl sharply, but she sustained his look without any reply and he went on grumbling to himself, "Yes, I think he knows now what a foolish son he has, I do not imagine he will try any longer to put that young man in my place when I go." Sophia pressed her lips together and would not speak. "Ah! you do not mean to tell me anything," complained the little man, "but you do not need to speak. I know all about the girl with the cerebral abscess. Sister Gater reported it to me this evening."

Sophia thought this unfair and said so. "I don't think Sister Gater need go spreading it all over the hospital," she declared hotly. The R.S.O. shrugged his shoulders. "All over the hospital," he mimicked her sourly, "about that I know nothing. If the nurses chatter, I cannot help it. There

are plenty of people who do not like young Mr. Groom, or old Mr. Groom. I do not like either of them myself," he stated calmly. "They have not treated me well. The young man does not do what I tell him and the old man gives me orders as if I were a student. It does not please me to be told to do this and that, without any politeness by your Mr. Groom. In my own country I was as good as he is. I had my own clinic, I taught my students, I was a professor in the university."

He spat the words at Sophia like an angry cat, and she did not know what to say to him. She felt ashamed that she had considered his point of view so little. She had thought of him simply as a tiresome and touchy little man, always on his dignity and interfering wherever he could with the hospital routine. She wished now that she had taken a little more trouble to be pleasant to him. "No," said he, crossly, "I have no reason to consider Mr. Groom, or his stupid son." He fixed her with his bright eye and demanded, "Why did you not tell me about this case, Fräulein."

She murmured, "Mr. Groom asked me not to talk about it," and he exploded, "But it is my business to know what happens in this hospital. I am the senior resident officer, Fräulein, and I am here to make sure that you young doctors make no foolish mistakes. You should have reported this case to me. It is not good for the hospital that such a thing should happen here; no, it is not good. I shall make my complaint in writing to-morrow to Captain Chandler and he shall report it to the board of management."

Sophia did not know what she ought to say to him. She murmured uncertainly, "Can't you pass it over, just this once?" but he shook his head. "No, no," he persisted, "I could not go away from here and leave that young man to make other such mistakes. He is not careful, he does not think enough of his work. In our profession that is the great crime. To be ignorant or to be unskilful, that can be mended in time; but to be so careless that you do not examine your patient, that is how bad trouble starts. You wish me to make excuses for him because he is young, because he is soon to be married, because he is the son of your great Mr. Groom; but I will not do it, Fräulein, you should not ask me to do it. He must have his lesson, this young man, or he will do worse things. It is not good that he should so play with the poor people and their lives."

There was a strange plain dignity about the man, which Sophia could not but recognise and when he repeated, "You

should have told me," she confessed, "I'm sorry; I didn't look at it that way." He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I have all I want from Sister Gater," said he. "Mr. Groom shall not blame you; but after I am gone, when you have my place, you shall remember that the patients come first." He sat, forgetting her, staring into the red-hot skulls of the gas-fire. She thought with remorse that nobody had troubled to ask him where he was going and when he had sat silent for a minute or two she plucked up her courage to inquire; but he only screwed up his round wrinkled face and replied impatiently, "It is a hospital in Wales, I cannot pronounce the name of it, a place where there are coalmines." Sophia was amused by the cross way he said it, she thought of all the many people in Yeoman's Hospital who had refused to try and pronounce his own complicated Bohemian name. "I hope you'll be happy there," said she, smiling pleasantly and then could have bitten her tongue for her carelessness in choosing just that word to throw at him.

"Happy?" said the little Czech doctor, bitterly; "why should I be happy anywhere in this country? I know nobody here, it is always cold and I do not like the food. I must have bread to eat and a room to sleep in, and enough work to keep my hands and my brain busy; otherwise all places are alike to me, and every day is too long. I cannot be happy while I am out of my own country." She told him as gently as she could, "Some day you will go home again." He replied with a ghastly stare, "I have no home; all that is finished for me," but then corrected himself. "Yes; you do well to remind me, Fräulein, some day I shall go back to my own country, it cannot be very long now before that time comes. Then I shall find work to do, very much work. All that those devils have destroyed must be built up again. My hands and my mind will be busy then; I shall not find the day long enough for all I have to do. Ah, Fräulein," said he, getting up and stretching his arms with a wide gesture, "when that time comes I shall work with all my heart."

For a moment he looked like quite a different person from the little fretful man who had so often vexed her. Then he dropped his arms to his sides, shrugged his shoulders, spread out his hands in one of his foreign gestures and said, mocking himself, "Well, that is my affair; I will not trouble you with it. Instead I will tell you something which is good for you to know. You should not think too much about whether you are happy or not happy; you cannot arrange that for yourself and it is not important."

She could not help smiling at his arrogant air. "It is important to me," she pleaded, but he only shook his bristling untidy grey head. "No, it is not important at all," he stated firmly. "What matters is that you should do good work." She laughed, she could not help it, because he looked so comically earnest as he enunciated this platitude with his round eyes wide open and his hair all standing on end. "You laugh now, because you are still very young," said he in his self-satisfied way, "but some day when you are older you will know that I am right"; and then with one of his impulsive movements he jumped up and ran to the wireless. "It is just striking nine," said he. "You make me forget the time, you make me forget the news." He was one of the few people in the hospital who ever troubled with it.

2

Actually there was nothing very special in the bulletin that night. It was just slow slogging fighting everywhere; too much snow in the Apennines and not enough of it on the Russian front, another night-raid on the German factories, a new harbour bombed in the South Seas, an encounter with E boats in the Channel, two more U-boats sunk in the Bay of Biscay and a convoy brought safely to port. The uphill road to victory seemed a little less steep than it had been; that was all. Sophia could not fix her weary and tormented mind upon any of this, but the little Czech listened carefully, nodding his head as he ticked off the various items of news. When it was over he looked at the girl with an unaccustomed twinkle in his eye and said, more pleasantly than ever before, "Now, if you wish, I will let you do your night round, Fräulein. It is a little early still, but not too early; the nurses will be ready for you." She laughed, bit her lip and asked him whether he would not come with her. He was entitled to go round any beds he chose and she had sometimes fancied that he liked the flattery of being asked for an opinion, but this time he shook his head. "No, I shall first read my book while it is quiet," said he, "and then when I have finished my chapter I must write my letter to Captain Chandler."

Sophia assumed her white coat and the official air which went with it, took her torch and went away along the blue-lit passages to visit her two wards. She forced herself to go to Syme first, but there everything was in order, as she had known it would be. The long perspective of the ward was

already as quiet and warm as a nursery. Most of the women were asleep, with shoulders humped under red blankets, heads buried in pillows and long plaits lying out across the sheets; only one or two restless creatures stirred or turned over as she went by. The lamp on the table reflected a deep ladder of light in the polished floor, as a ship's riding-light will do in the water of a harbour; fat Nurse Hooper jumped up from the armchair beside it, where she was knitting a canary-yellow jumper for herself. The night staff were always knitting, it appeared to be their favourite occupation.

Sophia went round the beds with her, checking the sleeping draughts and hypodermic injections and hearing the uneventful day's report. She lingered a minute or two beside the bed in the corner, where the girl with the cerebral abscess was snoring steadily behind her screens. "She's quite comfortable, Miss Dean," reported Nurse Hooper. "She hasn't come properly round at all yet. Night Sister told her people they could go home." Sophia nodded, glanced at the chart, and stood for a minute or two, feeling the girl's pulse and listening to her breathing. Nurse Hooper, a comfortable soul, who did not worry about anything, not even about her own examinations, remarked how anxious Sophia looked. "What's she got to worry about?" wondered the nurse, "You'd think she'd be uncommonly pleased with herself about the whole business," for she had collected the true story about Dick Groom's blunder and how Sophia had retrieved it, from the day-staff, behind the kitchen door, while she hung up her cape and unpacked her knitting. Sophia, however, had other things to think about. As she put the hot hand back under the bedclothes she could indeed say to herself, "Well, I suppose Sister Gater and I between us did save this girl's life"; but her deep satisfaction over a piece of work well done was all mixed up with a new sense of danger and uncertainty and an odd illogical pity for Dick. That five minutes' carelessness of his had been like a stone dropped into a pool, the ripples from it were spreading still and would go further. She murmured, as she turned from the bed, "I don't suppose she'll give us any more trouble," but the phrase struck awkwardly on her own ears. This snoring girl had made trouble enough already for the medical staff of Yeoman's Hospital, and there was more to come.

As she walked out from between the red screens, with Nurse Hooper backing respectfully against the wall to let her pass, she admitted that the whole business had shaken her. "I'll remember this all my life," vowed Sophia, walking

down the ward, between the two rows of beds, with her head bent and her hands in her pockets, in the way that she always walked when she was thinking hard. "It could have happened to me; I daresay it could have happened to any one. It was a bit of good luck for me that I found the girl, it was a bit of frightful bad luck for Dick Groom. He's done for himself now, as far as this place is concerned; he's out of the running, the board will never give him that job now. I can have it myself if I choose, but then I don't choose. I'm going away from here, back to London; next month there'll be somebody else going round these beds at night instead of me." It was strange how deeply this thought troubled her. She had not understood, until that moment, that she cared at all about Yeoman's. She found that she had asked herself "Why am I going away? I could live in this place, I could find work enough to do, I could be happy here if I chose." Nurse Hooper looking sideways at her, supposed that she was worrying still about the case in the corner and wondered what made her shake her head with such angry impatience, as if something had stung her, before she said good-night abruptly and walked out of the ward. "Well, thank goodness! that's over," reflected Nurse Hooper, returning to the table. "Nothing else now but Sister's round. This looks like being an easy night; I might get my jumper finished." She sat down again and counted stitches under the lamp.

Sophia meanwhile had taken her sore heart across to Lister, where the night looked like being a busy one. Red-haired Nurse Fisher was on the run between her three operation cases; she had a light burning behind Pedlar's screens and another in the far corner, where the latest appendix was not too comfortable. "He says his bandages are tight, Miss Dean," related Nurse Fisher, smoothing down her apron; "but he's only a bit blown up, I think." Sophia agreed, but she cut the two top turns of bandage with Nurse Fisher's scissors as well as ordering pituitrin; Nurse Webber, up in the theatre, was always inclined to bandage her operation cases a little too firmly. Burgess, the man in the corner, was sound asleep, he at least had had a good day. "He went off without his dope for the first time," reported Nurse Fisher, sticking her scissors back into her belt, "and Sister says his dressing looks very good. He's taken a turn for the better." Sophia was pleased to hear it. "I don't ever want to see a worse mess than he was in when he first came here," she admitted, and Nurse Fisher sighed a heart-felt, "No, indeed, Miss Dean," as the two young women

moved on to Number Ten, the boy with the broken leg.

He roused up and whimpered a little as they looked at him, opened his dark drugged eyes and stared at Sophia with a long bewildered gaze. She touched his damp hot little hand and he said something, but she could not catch it. "What's that, dear?" Nurse Fisher asked and he said it again; this time it sounded like "Hurt." His lip trembled and a single tear trickled down his flushed cheek. "Yes, dear, I know it hurts," Nurse Fisher told him in her singsong Welsh voice; "but we're going to make it better for you." She lifted the end of the counterpane, where it hung over the leg-cradle, shifted a sandbag slightly and nodded her red head. "Now you shut your eyes," she commanded, "and go to sleep; and when you wake up, look you, it'll be morning."

The child sighed, laid down his head on his pillow with a gentle confiding movement, shut his eyes obediently and seemed to fall asleep as they watched him. "He's no trouble at all," whispered Nurse Fisher, but Sophia did not answer. She turned away from the bed and her heart was wrenched by the thought, "I wanted a child, Neil's child, but that's all over and done with."

Nurse Fisher pulled one of the red screens back from the foot of Pedlar's bed, and at the same moment the tall Night Sister came into the ward. She joined the other two and stood watching Pedlar in a professional attitude, upright and calm, resting one wrist in the hollow of the other hand. The shepherd was conscious again and he was not lying flat any longer. They had got the foot of his bed down by this time and the head of it up on a kitchen chair. He was propped in the weary Fowler position, with half a dozen pillows round him and a bolster under his knees, tied up to the bed rail; but he seemed to be sliding down from this height and collapsing into himself all the time, like a disjointed doll. His left arm was bandaged to a splint, and the red rubber tubes of the saline apparatus ran down to it; somehow this arm looked as if it were an artificial limb, which did not belong to him. His face might have been a mummy's, with the skin stretched like brown shining leather over the skull bones and the lips drawn back from the teeth in a dead man's grin; but he was not dead yet, nor dying even, he was in better shape than he had been four hours earlier. When Sophia had seen him then, on her way down from the theatre, she had felt very doubtful about his chances; but now his skin was neither so cold nor so damp as it had been

and his pulse was certainly a little more steady. He had scarcely the strength yet to move his head on the pillow, but his eyes turned and followed her, mutely demanding what next was going to be done with him.

On the other side of the bed his old wife sat steadfast and motionless with her hands clasped before her ; she did not stir but she trembled all over and she, too, watched Sophia with fear and supplication. Nurse Fisher began whispering to her that she should go, but Sophia made her a sign to let the old woman be. She did not mean to trouble the sick man much ; she only needed after all to take a long serious look at his face, feel his skin and his pulse and assure herself that the saline was running steadily into the vein at the bend of his elbow. Quiet was what he most needed now and warmth and good nursing. As she straightened her tired back she said to herself, "That little foreigner was right ; I was only fussing. This man is going to pull through for the present. There isn't anything more that I can do for him. He'll be nursed up till he's strong enough to get out and go home. After that he'll come back again every so often. Mr. Groom will feel him about and question him. Neil will do test-meals on him and the X-ray people will make more films of his stomach. One day, perhaps, they'll have to tell him that his growth is coming back again or if he's lucky enough, after a year or two, they'll make up their minds that he's cured ; but I shall never hear what's become of him." The thought vexed her, she would have liked to know the end of the shepherd's tale. "He's reacted very well to that last dose of coramine," observed Sister Mercer, Sophia nodded, smiled and said to the man, "You're doing very nicely," but whether he understood her or not she could not tell. His lips moved and he uttered a faint sound like a groan, his eyes slid away from hers. It was his wife that he needed to see. The little old woman hitched her chair closer to the bed, took his cold rough hand in hers and said to him, as if they were alone, "Don't move, Joe ; don't try to talk. I'm here ; I won't go away from you." The sick man's eyes closed again and he seemed to settle down a little more comfortably into himself among his pillows, as Sophia and the two nurses went out into the ward.

Down by the table, looking over the night-report with Sister Mercer and nodding as she agreed to change a treatment, Sophia murmured with a doubtful backward look, "Is that woman going to sit there all night ?" Sister Mercer admitted, with an apologetic smile, "Well, I did try to

persuade her that we could look after him, but I couldn't get her to go. Miss Cutler would have found her a night's lodging easily enough, of course. Mrs. Wright, the porter's wife, will always take any one in," said Sister Mercer with that strange encyclopædic knowledge of ways and means which the older sisters always displayed. "Now that her boy's out fighting in Italy she's got a room to spare. But these old country people are very obstinate sometimes; you can't argue with them. Neither of these two have ever had anything to do with a hospital before. Pedlar was asking for his wife all morning, Sister Abbot said, worrying that she didn't come before he went up to the theatre; and after he came round she was the first thing he looked for. If I were to send her away now he'd fret after her and that would do him no good. Don't you worry about it, Miss Dean," advised Sister Mercer, studying the girl's downcast and troubled face by the imperfect light of the green-shaded lamp. "Mrs. Pedlar won't give any trouble; she isn't the sort to make a fuss. There are some women I'd have packed off hour's ago but she's the quiet kind. She'll just sit there beside him and later on in the night, if he drops off to sleep, Nurse Fisher here will see that she gets some rest. To tell you the truth, I shouldn't have the heart to send her away." And as the girl continued to stand there, with her hands in her pockets, looking down at the floor, Sister Mercer concluded in her mild way, "When a man's as ill as that, his wife ought to be with him."

"Yes," said Sophia in a very small voice; "yes, I know," and suddenly she pressed both hands to her eyes and held them there a minute as if her head ached unbearably, while the two nurses stared at her. Then she shook her head angrily, said, "All right, Sister; you shouldn't want me for anything else to-night," turned on her heel and walked out of the ward. When the door had shut behind her, "Well," exclaimed Nurse Fisher, a privileged young woman, almost done with her training, "whatever was the matter with Miss Dean to-night? She looked ready to drop." "She's had a long day, I daresay," agreed Sister Mercer. "She's a hard worker, not like some; but she did look as if she'd had about enough, certainly. Now you get on with those two four-hourly feeds, nurse, while I go down to Sydenham. There's a man there won't last the night," and she sighed slightly. Her own day had not yet well begun.

Going out of the ward, Sophia had said to herself, "Yes, when a man's ill, his wife ought to be with him; but when

Neil's ill I shan't be here any longer." That thought lasted her as far as the bottom of the stairs. She walked down the passage to the door of the residents' room, but did not go in. The front hall was just beyond, and in it hung the indicator board, which displayed the names of the doctors on duty or in the hospital. Sophia walked over and looked at it. There were two names still there, with "In" against them; one was Dr. Shoesmith's because he was lecturing to the nurses, the other was the one she expected and dreaded. If the porter had not forgotten to shift the indicator, as sometimes happened, Neil must be up in the laboratory, working late. He did this two or three times a week. It was not particularly good for him, but he persisted in it, because it was the only quiet time that he could get for his own research. Sophia herself was the one person who sometimes disturbed him, going up when she thought the coast was clear; it would have vexed her to realise how many of the night staff knew about these visits of hers. She had not meant to go up to the laboratory to-night, she did not even know what she meant to say to Neil when she got there, but for some reason or other her feet took her against her will, all the way back, across the black-and-white marble pavement to the doors of the lift. She shut herself into it and was carried up to the top floor.

Nothing could have annoyed her more than to find the laboratory door open, the light burning and the room empty. If she could not talk to Neil this evening, when the whole of her being was turned towards him in pain and pity, she would have to add up the sum of their lives again and it might not come out the same way twice. She could have cried with vexation and disappointment as she stood in the bright empty room, looking about her at the orderly rows of jars and bottles and the wild confusion of papers on Neil's desk. She heard a clock ticking and a tap dripping, but no other sound. Neil might have gone home, leaving the light carelessly burning and his papers loose; she had known him do it once or twice before. She had actually put out her hand to the switch of the electric light, intending to turn it off and go away, when a sudden scramble among Neil's flasks and beakers, on the draining board by the sink made her heart jump into her mouth. There was something alive in the room beside herself, a fat brown-and-white spotted guinea-pig, sitting up on the corner of the draining board and watching her with its beady black eyes.

She felt sure that it ought not to be at large. It must have

escaped from one of the cages where Neil kept a few of the little beasts for inoculations and experimental tests. She had fed them and handled them for him sometimes when he was busy and the lab. boy off duty. This one seemed perfectly tame and even ran a step or two towards the girl as if expecting to be fed. She held out her hand and spoke to it, but the little beast would not let itself be caught. It surveyed her with an air of intelligent appraisal, raising its snout and twitching its nostrils, but when she ventured to move forward it took fright, and popped out of sight between a couple of jars. She hesitated, stopped, and heard a long dreary groan, a frightening sound at that hour, in that seemingly empty room. It came from low down on the floor, inside the cupboard where Neil did his chemical work.

She went quickly in and found Neil lying face downwards on the floor, with his arms spread wide and his head turned away from her. There was vomit on the boards near him and some fresh blood mixed with it. She thought at first that he must be unconscious, but as she dropped on her knees beside him, with an exclamation of dismay, he struggled a little and tried to raise his head. She told him sharply, "Don't move," but he had already turned himself on his side. He drew up his legs with a convulsive movement and then groaned again, more loudly than before.

For the moment she felt like any ignorant girl. His colour was so ghastly pale that it frightened her. The freckles stood out on his ashy skin, and his hand was cold and damp when she touched it. The pulse at his wrist was hard and small, like a twitching thread between the bones, and at first she could scarcely find it. She thought that he had fainted away, but as she laid down his hand he made an effort to speak. She heard him say, "Fetch . . ." and then again, "Fetch . . ." but he could not find the name he wanted. She bent over him and told him urgently, "It's, all right, Neil, I'm here ; I'll see to you. It's me, it's Sophy." He was the only person in the world who called her by that variant of her name.

He repeated it vacantly once, as if it meant nothing to him ; then he opened his eyes and seemed to recognise her. A strangely touching look of peace and trust came into his face, and he repeated her name. The girl's heart turned over and she trembled in a passion of love and fear. Like the mother who seizes and shakes her child when it has just been saved from some accident, she cried out with the utmost exasperation, "What the hell have you done to yourself now ?"

He shut his eyes again and screwed up his sandy eyebrows in a fretful grimace, as if the light hurt them. "I don't know," he sighed, as her sure and clever hands eased him into a more comfortable position and she began to examine him, loosening coat and shirt with mechanical accustomed movements. "It was after I'd eaten my supper. I came back here to work and the pain got bad after a bit. I'd a heap of work to do and I couldn't stand it, so I put my finger down my throat, to be sick and get over it; but it wasn't any use. The pain just got worse and worse and then . . . I suppose . . . I must have passed out." His voice, which had been a little stronger, wandered and failed and he cried out sharply as the girl's hands touched the rigid muscle on the right side under his ribs. That wooden resistance told Sophia all that she needed to know of the internal disaster which had overtaken him. She covered him up, sat back on her heels and said grimly, "Well, it's perfectly obvious what's happened. You've perforated that ulcer of yours. I always said you would."

"That's about the size of it," he murmured, still with his eyes shut, adrift upon a sea of pain. He bit his lip as she complained, "You wouldn't rest, or look after yourself, you wouldn't listen to any of us. Now old Groom will get his knife into you and serve you right." Almost beside herself with grief and anguish, she wrung her hands and cried out, "Oh! Neil, how could you?"

He uttered a long sigh, but did not defend himself. She stared about the little empty closet, then through the open door saw the house-telephone on the laboratory wall. It gave her an idea and she bent over him. "Listen, Neil," said she urgently. "Dr. Shoesmith might be over in the nurses' home still, if he didn't get away too promptly after his lecture. I'm going to ring over and see if I can get hold of him." He murmured, more sensibly than she expected, "Yes, get Uncle Tom; he'll see to things for you. If he's gone get Night Sister, I shall be . . . all right."

She got to her feet and went through to the wall telephone. Standing with the receiver to her ear, she turned her eyes sideways in her head to watch the sick man. He looked dreadfully ill, lying there in that crumpled attitude, and it struck her that she ought to have covered him up more warmly before she left him. The home sister's quacking voice in the receiver admitted that Dr. Shoesmith had not yet come out of the lecture theatre. "Then catch him and send him up at once to the path-lab.," said Sophia. "Tell

him Dr. Marriner has been taken ill." She rang off before the home sister could ask her any more questions, and went back to Neil, snatching down his own overcoat from its peg behind the door, to wrap round him. "For a grown man, Neil," said she bitterly, kneeling beside him, "you've no more sense than a baby. You need somebody to look after you at every turn."

He answered in a voice so faint that she could scarcely hear it, "Yes . . . I need . . . you." It struck her to the heart like a knife, and in spite of herself a sob broke from her. At that his eyes opened and he looked at her strangely, as he murmured, "Don't go away, Sophy. I can't get on without you." She seized his hand and cried out, "I'll never leave you." It was a vow as much to herself as to him, she knew now what would become of her, she had chosen her life's work and accepted her captivity. When Dr. Shoesmith came in he found her still kneeling by the sick man, holding fast to his hand.

There was a small room opening off the landing between Lister and Syme. It had one bed in it and was used for patients requiring observation, restraint or quarantine; the younger nurses had nicknamed it the Padded Room, though in fact it was nothing of the kind. Patients suspected of an infectious disease could be nursed there to keep them out of the wards; cases of *delirium tremens*, attempted suicides, incipient manias and so forth were put in there until they could be moved to more suitable quarters elsewhere; and any of the resident staff who fell sick were often nursed there for convenience, as their own quarters were across the courtyard and a long way from any of the wards. This room was fortunately empty and ready; and Dr. Shoesmith had his nephew carried down to it.

Nurse Hooper from Syme, coming across the landing to consult Nurse Fisher in Lister about the progress of her knitted jumper, found the whole place in a bustle. As she passed the open door she got a glimpse of Miss Dean's white coat and Dr. Shoesmith's black one, besides two sisters' uniforms; one was the night sister, because the girl saw her tall figure and white hair; the other, shorter and stouter, looked for all the world like Sister Abbot, but what was she doing there at that time of night? She should have gone off duty long ago. Nurse Hooper, all eyes and ears, dodged into

Lister ward and found Nurse Fisher filling hot-water bottles in the sluice. "What on earth have you got in the Padded Room, ducks?" she inquired. "A drunk or a cut-throat? You people in Lister get all the fun and games, don't you?" and Nurse Fisher, with a giggle, exclaimed, "Ssh; it's Dr. Marriner. He's got a perforated duodenal." Nurse Hooper, leaning companionably against the sink, protested, "Go on; tell us another," and Nurse Fisher nodded her red head up and down. "It is him, it is really. Don't hang about there, or we shall have Sister down on us. Get back into Syme and fish out your drip-saline apparatus, there's a dear. I was just coming over to borrow it, Sister told me to; ours is in use. I must dash with these." She scuttled off with a hot-water bottle under each arm and Nurse Hooper, following discreetly, saw Dr. Shoesmith's back at the telephone in Sister Abbot's office. She went past on tiptoe and heard him say, "Is that you, Groom? Sorry to trouble you at this time of night, but we've a nice kettle of fish here. My nephew... yes, my nephew..." She did not dare to linger, but hurried by and regained the safety of her own dull ward.

Presently over came Nurse Fisher to collect the big container, the glass and rubber tubing and the needles. It took a few minutes more than it need have done to assemble them, while she swung her feet from the table and passed on the tale. "It was Miss Dean found him. She went up to the lab. to talk to him, the way she does in the evenings," related Nurse Fisher with a knowing twinkle, "and there he was lying on the floor. They fetched old Daddy Shoesmith down from lecturing to the third-years and then they got Night Sister, and Sister Abbot came back, and there was a hell of a scramble. Daddy Shoesmith's just finished ringing up Mr. Groom, and he's coming down to operate at eleven; they're getting the theatre ready now. Dr. Marriner looks awfully bad."

"I'm terrified of Dr. Marriner," said Nurse Hooper, rummaging at the back of the top shelf for another box of needles. "When you go up to the lab. for anything he looks at you as if you were a sort of half-wit. I don't know what Miss Dean sees in him, I'm sure." Both she and Nurse Fisher were perfectly well aware that there was something afoot between Miss Dean and Dr. Marriner. "She was in an awful state about him when they got him down here," Nurse Fisher related. "He was all green in the face and sweating like anything, before we got him into bed and she was nearly crying. 'It serves him right,' she said to old

Daddy Shoesmith. 'He's such a damned fool, he won't take any care of himself.' You know how she always swears a bit when things go wrong. I was trying to get him undressed, but he was in such pain that he'd hardly let me touch him. He was holding himself quite stiff, the way they always do." Nurse Hooper nodded, holding a needle up to the light. She had seen a perforated gastric ulcer before; any nurse working for Mr. Groom in Syme or Lister was bound to come across one or two in her time. "Well, then," related Nurse Fisher with enjoyment, "Sister Abbot turned round to me very sharp, you know her style, and said, 'Get me a quarter of a grain of morphia at once, nurse'; so I had to go back to the ward; but just as I went out I saw Dr. Marriner get hold of Miss Dean's hand and hold on as tight as anything. Then she said, 'All right, Neil, I'm here,' and he said to her, 'Darling, don't leave me.'"

The two girls stared at one another, round-eyed. "He never did," breathed Nurse Hooper; and Nurse Fisher nodded, "He did indeed, he did really. He said, 'Darling, don't leave me,' and she said, 'I promise I won't.' Of course he didn't really know what he was saying. I don't think Night Sister heard, because you know how deaf she's got lately, but Sister Abbot didn't miss it; or Daddy Shoesmith either. He gave Miss Dean such a look, you wouldn't believe; but she didn't take any notice, she just went on standing there letting Dr. Marriner hold on to her hand. Gosh! Hooper, do look alive with those needles, or I shall have Sister after me. He's to get intravenous glucose right away. I'll tell you the rest of it at supper time, if I ever get there. They've given us a perfectly disgusting meal to-night, but I don't suppose I shall have much time to eat it anyway."

In the little private ward, Dr. Shoesmith took a final thoughtful stare at his nephew. The nurses had got him fairly comfortable, and the morphia was beginning to take hold of him. His bright wandering eyes were growing drowsy and he had relaxed a little among his pillows. He was still fidgeting about a piece of neglected work up in the laboratory and had repeated fretfully once or twice, "That gland, Sophy; old Groom wants the sections mounted by to-morrow," but Miss Dean bending over him, assured him firmly, "All right, Neil, I'll see to it myself," and at that his anxious frown relaxed. Dr. Shoesmith knitted his bushy

eyebrows and shot a quick twinkling glance at the girl ; this display of authority seemed to interest him. The two sisters stood calmly watching ; the sick man stared round with his fever-bright eyes, as if he did not see them clearly any longer. He groped again for the girl's hand, but this time she withheld it. " I've got to go now, Neil," she told him gently. Her clear voice seemed to penetrate the cloud of his sickness while he moved his head from side to side, " Tell my uncle," he began and then again, " Tell Uncle Tom about . . . us . . . won't you ? " Her colour rose, but she replied clearly, " Yes, I'll tell him," and then raised her head and looked steadily at Dr. Shoesmith. The old man cleared his throat, " Well, better leave the boy to you, Sister," said he. " We'll go down and wait for Mr. Groom ; he'll be coming along presently." Sister Mercer replied in her official manner, " The theatre will be ready for you, sir, at eleven."

The old man and the girl walked down the stairs together under the dim blue light. Neither

mind was in a fever of anxiety ; Tom because he was making up
They went into the residents' room
bulk down with a grunt into one
armchairs before the hissing gas-
said he to the hesitating girl, "
" Groom won't be here yet ; w
talked out." She seated herself
chair, looking composed enough
with her smooth chestnut head.
penetrating stare, but that was
first time in his knowledge of her
of countenance, and she avoided

He was not particularly pleased
life he hated to be left out of any
it vexed him to think that she
carrying on a love affair under
a hint of it. He did not want
his pleasant professional manner
he inquired, " Well, what's all th

She looked all round the room
him. She seemed unable to find
answer him. Provoked by her
Neil are in love with each other
retorted with a shrug of her shoulders
well gave us away didn't he ? "

out of the bag," agreed Dr. Shoesmith. "A hospital is a poor place for keeping secrets. Those women upstairs, you know, they didn't miss anything. They've married you off by this time, I expect."

The girl leaned her head on her hand and sighed, "You do mean to marry the boy, I suppose," old Tom asked her, perplexed by her vague and troubled air; but she only answered dully, "Oh, yes; I've promised him that"; and when he grumbled, "It's the first I've heard of it," continued, "We settled it six months ago, up in London, before ever I came here. We didn't tell anybody, because we didn't think the board would give me the job if they knew I was engaged to Neil." "No more we should," agreed Dr. Shoesmith promptly. "Well, you two have kept us all nicely in the dark, I hope you're pleased with yourselves." She offered no defence and he grumbled, "I must say I do feel a little hurt about this. Neil might have given me a hint of how the land lay. I shouldn't have given him away. Why couldn't the boy trust me? He's been like one of my own sons to me, I've seen him through his training, I'm the only relative he has in the world. He might have told me what was going on."

He stared at the girl liking her less than he had ever done, now that it was his business to make friends with her. Sitting there in her white coat, with her unruffled air, she seemed to him a hateful girl, hard and cold as a stone, with no kindness in her. He could not guess why his nephew had fallen in love with her. All of a sudden he felt old and tired. These young people were beyond him. He supposed that he would have to help his nephew again, as he had done before, in one trouble and another, but this time his heart would not be in it; and he exclaimed testily, more hurt than he cared to show, "I wish this hadn't happened. I'm not sure that you are the right sort of wife for Neil anyway."

At that she moved her hand in a strange helpless gesture. "I'm not; oh! I'm not," he heard her say, in a tone so sharp with distress that it quite startled him. "I've told him so, time and again. What Neil wants is a kind woman and I'm not that. We never meant to fall in love with each other. We both had quite different plans for our lives; this has spoilt everything."

Dr. Shoesmith sat and gazed at her, tugging at his beard and frowning; his eyes were sunk so deep beneath his grizzled eyebrows that their sparkle was quite hidden. "Yes," he admitted in the end, "it's the world's great

snare ; we all tumble into it." She gave a strangled laugh, more like a sob and told him humbly, " I don't know what to do with Neil, I don't know how to make him happy. We quarrel all the time, we make each other wretched. We've talked it out, over and over ; I've told him we ought to part company, I've begged him to put me out of his mind. We did make a clean break once, up in London, but it didn't last," said she, with a white wandering look which distressed the old man. " Neil came down here, but he couldn't stand it. He came back again and told me he couldn't get on without me. He begged me to change my mind and marry him. He was half out of his mind, I didn't know what to do about him, I felt sure I was making a great mistake, but I couldn't stand out against him any longer. I couldn't help myself." She leant her head on her hand and he heard her murmur, " I'm a fool, I suppose, but I can't live without him."

Old Tom sat considering her, as if she were tapping his right forefinger into the palm of his the gesture which he always used when he was about a case. He wanted to speak more kindly to he could not bring himself to do it. All of a sudden out, " I can't make you understand, I can't say thing to you. I'm so worried about Neil, I don't k I'm saying." The old man reproached himself forgetting that she must be in a frightful state c about the sick man upstairs. He said, as heartily as " Come now ; there's no need to look like that. N a fool to let himself get into this state, and you sh looked after him better ; but he's young and he The thing's been taken in the nick of time, and Groom's an admirable surgeon. There's no reason operation shouldn't be a complete success. By tomorrow we shall both be feeling very differen the boy." He had slipped unconsciously into his pr vein of encouragement, which was hearty enough completely sincere, since he did in fact think that some reason to be anxious about his nephew. stopped him between one accustomed phrase and with a movement of her thin hand. " Don't be to me," she told him bitterly. " Neil's about as ill be, and it's partly my fault. I never ought to hav

get as bad as this. I should have taken more care of him. The truth is, I was thinking about my own affairs."

Old Tom nodded thoughtfully, rubbing his nose, a trick he had when he was perplexed. "Neil's a difficult man to manage," he conceded. "A disagreeable devil, one of these hermit-crab natures. I don't know that he ought to marry at all." She said seriously "Oh, yes, he hates people. They get in his way when he's working; he can't get on with them, never could. Up at St. Catherine's we all knew his temper would be the ruin of him."

Old Tom surveyed her thoughtfully at this. "Perhaps you can tell me," he suggested "why he didn't stay at St. Catherine's. I always hoped he'd land that job he wanted under old Hodman in the Path. Lab. there and settle up in London for good; I was astonished when I heard that he'd given up the notion and wanted to come down here. Of course we were very glad to get him, but it wasn't quite what I'd hoped for him. May be you can explain it to me."

Sophia could answer this promptly and did so, with a straight and mournful look. "Yes, of course, Dr. Shoesmith. Didn't you know? Neil had a most frightful row with Dr. Hodman. You know what Neil's like, he will bite people's heads off when he ought to be making friends with them, and Dr. Hodman himself wasn't an easy man to get on with. I never quite heard the rights of it, but I fancy he told Neil off about something that went wrong in the lab. and Neil answered him back a bit too quickly saying, it wasn't his fault. Neil was pretty well under the weather at the time; it was when his ulcer was first getting bad, and he and I had just had things out together and decided to part company. Anyhow, he and Dr. Hodman both lost their tempers properly; and after that Hodman, who was a mean old beast anyhow, told the hospital committee that he couldn't recommend Neil for the job that was going. So the committee put in another man over Neil's head, and of course he wouldn't stand for that. He just threw in his hand and came away."

Old Dr. Shoesmith nodded gently, sitting twiddling his thumbs like an old priest hearing a confession; he always looked like that when he was getting to the bottom of a case. "Yes," said he, "yes, I see; and it was after that he persuaded you that it was your duty to marry him. You thought you were partly to blame, you had an idea that you could make it up to him. Women always think that." She coloured deeply at that. "If I did, it doesn't seem to

have worked," said she bitterly. "I've made things worse for him, really; we've worn out one another's patience. I've always been hankering after getting back to London and making him come with me. I didn't want him to sit down and hide in a corner all his life under one reverse, I wanted to make him try again. I've given him no peace. It hasn't been a happy time for either of us." And she concluded with childlike simplicity, "It was frightfully bad luck for him to fall in love with me."

"Well," said Dr. Shoesmith briskly, sitting up in his chair, "there's no sense in crying over split milk. If you want to make a success of this marriage, you'll have to do it yourself. Neil wasn't meant to run in double harness, I fancy, but he's your job, and you'll have to make the best of him. You won't be able to alter him much, he'll always be one of these secret people wanting to get into a corner and do his own work. You're just the opposite, aren't you? full of courage and curiosity, wanting to go out and meet trouble half-way. I'm sorry for you, young woman," said Dr. Shoesmith, pleased with her start of astonishment. "I fancy you'd have gone a long way on your own; but there it is, you've chosen to tangle yourself up with my nephew. It's human nature, you can't get away from it. Now you'll have to settle down here and do what you can with Neil and Wilchester. I suppose you think that's a dull prospect. Lord bless my soul! If anybody had told me, when I was your age, that I'd got to spend the rest of my days in this place, I'd have been disgusted."

The girl opened her eyes at this, and twinkled. "I daresay you think I'm a bit of a tions but yourself," he said. "I'm not, my dear, that I know what I'm talking about. I had great plans for myself, once upon a time. I wasn't going to spend my days pottering round a provincial town; no, I was going to set the Thames on fire. There were other people thought so, too; but I had to change my mind. My father died, you know, and there wasn't too much money. I had my old mother to look after and like you I wanted to get married; so in the end I had to come down to the family practice in Wilchester. I was sorry for myself at the time," said old Tom, looking back over what seemed to him a great many years, "but I got over it. I had to get over it, and after all, I haven't had such a bad time. I daresay it might look pretty unimportant to you, but I've done some useful work here at Yeoman's and I don't consider my life's been

wasted. "People can be sick, you know," said old Tom, smiling at her, "in other places than London. If work's what you want, I can find you plenty. And as for Neil, I shouldn't wonder if getting a girl like you for his wife mightn't be the making of the boy, God help him!"

That made her laugh out loud, as he had intended it should. He glanced with satisfaction at the clock; he had cunningly kept her mind from dwelling on the night's work to come. She sat there attentive and serious, as she would have done if he had been instructing her about a case. He surveyed her with reluctant admiration, thinking that after all she might not make such a bad wife for Neil Marriner. He heard voices and footsteps outside the door and shook his head at her. "They're coming for us now, Sophia," said he. "Take him and do what you can for him; and if you want any help, remember I'm here to give it."

Then the door opened and Mr. Groom came in, with the secretary superintendent behind him.

CHAPTER TWELVE

I

DR. SHOESMITH said to himself instantly and with astonishment, "What on earth's the matter with Groom?" for the big heavy dark man looked old and stricken, as if he had heard some piece of serious news. Dr. Shoesmith, who had not seen him all day and had heard nothing yet of the afternoon's events, had no clue to this air of troubled perplexity. For the first time in his experience he saw Richard Groom without his overbearing confidence, disturbed and at a loss. He listened with a vague and preoccupied air to Dr. Shoesmith's apologies. "I really am sorry to get you down here for an emergency at this time of night. My nephew should have consulted you before things got to the acute stage, but I'm afraid we doctors are as bad as the laity for putting off an operation." He did not much relish being beholden to Richard Groom, but the surgeon only shrugged his heavy shoulders, remarking in his ungracious way, "No fool like a young fool. I suppose he thought he could cure himself."

Captain Chandler turned his face from the physician to the surgeon and the five worried lines across his brow became

deeper than ever, but that might only be because he was expecting the two men to quarrel as usual. He interposed with an apology about having failed to get hold of the regular hospital anaesthetist. "I rang up his house, but his wife said he was out in the country on a private case. I'm afraid it'll have to be the R.S.O." He glanced anxiously over at Mr. Groom, as if he expected some objection, but the surgeon replied sourly, "Well, the man gives a perfectly good anaesthetic; it's about the best thing he does." That iron frown of his did not relax. Dr. Shoesmith told him hastily, "If you're satisfied with him, I'm sure I am; but don't you want him to assist." He was not familiar with the theatre arrangements nowadays and was surprised by the extreme violence of Groom's "Certainly not I wouldn't have him at any price," continued the surgeon, a little less savagely. "Fellow can't keep his hands out of your way, tries to do half the job himself. I don't want anybody but Miss Dean, she's learnt how I like things done by this time."

At this unexpected tribute Captain Chandler's eyebrows climbed still further up his forehead, and he looked both amused and perplexed. Dr. Shoesmith, on the other hand, was startled. He had not realised that Sophia would be expected to help with the operation and for the moment had an old-fashioned feeling that she ought not to be asked to do it; he turned and glanced doubtfully at her. She had been standing there against the wall ever since the two men came in, in an attentive professional attitude, watching their faces, but she only appeared serious, pale and composed, and when Mr. Groom also rounded on her, demanding, "You're available, aren't you, Miss Dean?" she said, "Certainly, sir," and took a step forward from the wall.

"You found him, didn't you?" demanded Mr. Groom, staring hard at her. "How was that?" The girl coloured faintly, but replied, with perfect composure, "I went up to the lab. at half-past nine, when I'd done my round and Dr. Marriner was lying on the floor. I fancy he'd collapsed about half an hour earlier." "After eight, anyhow," interposed Dr. Shoesmith, tugging at his beard. "The porter says that's when he came in." "Well," admitted Mr. Groom drily, glancing at the clock, "it's a lucky thing you happened to do that, Miss Dean, or he might have lain there a long time without anybody knowing. In these cases, every hour counts." Captain Chandler put in, "The R.S.O. has gone on up to the theatre," and Dr. Shoesmith, clearing his throat, remarked, "I fancy Sister will be about ready for us now."

Captain Chandler returned to his house and the other three went up to the theatre, stopping by the way to take a look at Neil, who by this time was too full of drugs to take much notice of any of them. Night Sister and a couple of nurses had got the theatre ready and the Czech doctor was already up there, busy with his anæsthetic machine. The patient was brought in, the surgeon and his assistant scrubbed up and they all got to work. Things went a little more slowly than they would have done in the daytime, but that was all. Dr. Shoesmith assumed a borrowed cap and gown and stood out of the way behind the anæsthetist to watch the operation. By this time he had quite forgotten his long and tiring day and was full of cheerful professional interest in the whole affair.

The ulcer appeared almost immediately, a hole as big as a threepenny piece in the anterior wall of the stomach, with a patch of angry red surrounding it. "There you are, Shoesmith," said Mr. Groom crossly, stabbing at the place with his forefinger and glaring through the slit in his mask. "Must have been giving the fool hell for months. Somebody should have brought him along to me sooner." The abdominal cavity was full of watery lymph, mixed with flakes of food; he washed and swabbed this away and then started stitching and patching as busily as a tailor on his bench. Old Tom Shoesmith, whose duties as senior physician rarely brought him up to the theatre nowadays, had not seen his colleague operate for quite a long time; he had forgotten how good the man was. "Yes," he said to himself, with reluctant admiration, "Neil couldn't have had the job done better anywhere in England."

He took the opportunity to have a good stare at Sophia too, while he was about it and was really impressed. The old man knew well enough that Mr. Groom was not at all easy to work for. He had long ago reduced all the operations which he did regularly to a practised routine, he did not make a single unnecessary movement, and it infuriated him when anybody got in his way. Sophia did not; she worked away calmly and steadily, doing exactly what was required of her, as if the man under the sterile towels were an unknown stranger. "Twenty minutes," calculated Dr. Shoesmith, glancing at the theatre clock, "and he hasn't sworn at anybody once; that must be a record for Groom." The whole business did not take long. To Mr. Groom it was just a perfectly simple and straightforward affair, of which he did a number each year. He closed the perforation, buried it safely

under a fold of omentum, put in a drainage tube lower down and sewed up. "There you are, Shoesmith," he said again, turning from the table while Sophia put on the dressings. "We shouldn't have any trouble with him. These cases do all right if you can get at them quickly enough"; and he walked out of the theatre.

Sophia pushed off her veil and Dr. Shoesmith saw her face, pale enough now certainly under the big theatre lamps, but composed and serene. "Well," he said to her, nodding and smiling pleasantly, "the boy will be all right now, I fancy. Get him along to his bed, will you? I'll be down presently." He nodded good-night to Sister Mercer and the nurses and went out into the dressing-room.

Mr. Groom was alone there, splashing and swilling and looking dead weary; old Tom could not but remark upon it. "I'm afraid you've had a heavy day," he observed, stripping off his borrowed gown. Groom gave him a sharp stabbing look, and seemed about to make some fierce reply, but then changed his mind and nodded his head. "I've had a bad day, Shoesmith," he confessed, turning away with an unstifled yawn and beginning to dry his arms. It was a perfectly simple remark, only somehow or other, in all the years during which they had been enemies, Dr. Shoesmith had never heard him admit such a thing before. "He must be pretty far gone if he'll say that to me," reflected old Tom, with a thoughtful stare, while he attended to some professional observations of the surgeon's about his nephew's case. "I'll be round to have a look at him in the morning," concluded Groom. "I've told Miss Dean what's to be done about him."

"She'll look after him all right, I fancy," observed old Tom, drily concealing his thoughts. "We can trust him to her. She's a very capable young woman"; and he meant it in more ways than one. Mr. Groom nodded, threw his towel into the corner of the room, took off his mackintosh apron and began shrugging himself back into his ill-fitting old dress coat. "I understand," he grunted over his shoulder, "that you're backing her for R.S.O when that foreign fellow clears out. Chandler says her name came up at the board this morning." "I'm backing her certainly," admitted Dr. Shoesmith. "Especially since I've seen her work to-night." The two ancient enemies looked hard at each other; and Mr. Groom, with a toss of his heavy head, like an old horse plagued with flies, said suddenly, "She can have it as far as I'm concerned."

Dr. Shoesmith was so astonished that he could hardly speak. "That's plain enough, isn't it?" demanded Mr. Groom irritably. "Do you want me to say it twice? I shan't stand in her way." "I thought your own boy would be putting in for it," objected Dr. Shoesmith and was yet more bewildered when his enemy replied, with a fierce kind of groan, "I shouldn't be backing Dick now if he were, but he won't be . . . he certainly won't be." He gave Dr. Shoesmith a long angry stare. "Maybe you don't know what I'm talking about," said he reluctantly. "Well, it doesn't matter. It's a long story and there are plenty of people who'll be glad to tell it you in the morning; Chandler for one, he likes his bit of gossip as well as any old woman in Wilchester. I'm not going to start on it to you myself at five minutes past midnight. All I've got to say to you is that I've changed my mind, Miss Dean can stop here if she chooses." And he turned on his heel and walked out through the dressing-room door, which Sister had left wedged open. Dr. Shoesmith heard his heavy tread die away down the passage. "God bless my soul!" said old Tom to himself. "What's the meaning of that?" but there was nobody there who could give him any answer.

He went downstairs himself and on his way looked in at the private ward, on the landing between Syme and Lister. The nurses had got Neil into bed by this time; and there was nobody with him but Sophia, who was standing beside him, intently watching his unconscious face. She was still covered up from neck to heel in the long white theatre gown, smelling faintly of anæsthetic, but she had pulled her head-veil down so that it lay in folds like a monk's cowl round her neck; her young head rose out of it undefended, and the lamplight shone brightly on her chestnut hair. Her face had a serious and hopeful expression as she looked down at the sick man. Old Dr. Shoesmith saw her for the first time through his nephew's eyes as a vulnerable creature, courageous, tender and still very young; with all his heart he pitied her. She glanced up as he came in, gave him her steady smile and murmured in a gentle midnight tone, "Neil's in quite good shape. He stood that better than I expected."

Dr. Shoesmith nodded from the other side of the bed. "Groom did the whole thing very prettily for us; it couldn't have gone off better, there wasn't any time wasted. I'm sorry you were let in for helping with it, though; I'd have got you out of that if I'd thought about it beforehand. It was

stupid of me, but you see I didn't know how matters stood between you and Neil earlier."

The girl gave him a clear astonished glance. "Why, you didn't think I'd have wanted to let anybody else in on it, did you?" she exclaimed. Dr. Shoesmith found this remark unexpected but characteristic and told her in his benevolent way, "At any rate nobody could have done better." Sophia coloured brightly at the compliment, and the old man found, like his nephew, a certain pleasure in calling up that schoolgirl blush. He watched it benignly as he told her, "Groom said an odd thing to me just now up in the dressing-room. He told me that if you wanted to put in for the R.S.O. job next month he wouldn't stand in your way. He said 'As far as I'm concerned she can have it if she chooses'."

He had expected some mark of surprise from the girl, but he was disappointed. There was a brilliant gleam of pleasure in Sophia's eye, but she did not speak; and after a minute old Tom grumbled, "Well, you're not so taken aback as I was. Maybe you know more about what's in Groom's mind than I do. I'd have expected him to fight this thing to the last ditch. I don't know what's the matter with the man, upon my soul I don't!" He eyed Sophia narrowly, but she only murmured, "Then you'd advise me to take it?" Dr. Shoesmith said to himself that he knew by this time the exact worth of her polite submissive air, and how much resolution it covered and he retorted, "Don't look at me like that, my girl; take what you can get and be thankful!" Less violently he added, "You don't need to worry about Neil for the next six months. When Groom's finished with him and Sister Abbot has got him on his legs again, you can send him across to the Great House while you do your work here in peace. Yeoman's will keep the job open for him till he's fit to come back to work and his aunt will be delighted to look after him. There's nothing my wife enjoys more than getting her hands on a sick man. I've always been a disappointment to her in that way, my health's been too good to please her. Now that the boys are all grown up and gone away Eleanor's got nobody to fuss over, except when she can borrow a grandchild. If you and Neil settle in this town it'll fill a gap for her; she'll enjoy looking after the pair of you. She likes to have young people about the place," said old Tom in his grandfatherly way, "and she approved of you long before I did." Sophia sustained his twinkling smile steadily as he summed her up with approval. "I fancy there's no more need for any of us to worry about Neil.

Leave him now, my dear and try to get some sleep. You look as if you'd done about enough for one day."

She yawned, rubbed her eyes with her fists like a child, stretched out her arms in a long sigh and confessed, "This has been the longest day of my life." He looked at her as pleasantly as if she had indeed been his daughter. "Ah?" said he, "You haven't lived very long yet, have you, my dear? When you get to be as old as I am you'll have learnt to be thankful that no day lasts longer than twenty-four hours."

She laughed and went away, observing that she would have another day's work to do in the morning. Dr. Shoosmith walked down through the corridors of the hospital, listening to his own footsteps in the quiet night and nodding his head with sober satisfaction. "By God!" he said to himself, "Neil's lucky to get that girl and Yeoman's is lucky too; that's what I care about most." He went out of the hospital gates, across St. Blazey's churchyard and home to his own house.

2

Sawyer, the night porter, had come on duty at eleven and settled himself as usual in the lodge. He hung up his uniform coat and cap on a nail behind the door and sat by the fire in an old knitted jacket, roasting his feet in front of his glowing coals, with his hair rumpled up and his spectacles down at the end of his nose. Somebody had dropped an evening paper in one of the rubbish baskets in the out-patient hall, and old Sawyer folded it into a small square and read it through as slowly as he could, turning and refolding it from time to time. With care it would last him through the night. He was an old sailor who had made many voyages in the China Seas and he spelt out the news of the war at sea wherever he could find it, shaping the words soundlessly with his lips and pleased when he came to the name of any harbour he knew. There was seldom anything much to do at night, except to let the pupil-midwives in and out. One came in at half-past eleven, another was fetched out about midnight. A sharp-featured boy came for her with a card and a name and tapped on Sawyer's glass-panel. "You got no business out of your bed, this time of night," Sawyer told him, peering sharply over his spectacles. "Ain't, there nobody older than you to send up for the nurse?" "Our Dad's on night-shift at the goods station," retorted the boy, "Shuntin'; that's where our Dad is, an' our Mum's took

bad. You send that nurse down quick, Mister, or the baby'll get there first. I know all about it ; we got six already." He grinned impudently and Sawyer replied, dispassionately, " Ah ! you're one of the sharp ones, ain't you ? Mind you don't cut yerself." He turned to the wall telephone behind him and slowly fumbled out the number of Chamberlayne Ward. " Nurse wanted on district, please ; woman of the name of Bowyer, Number Five, Castle Ditches. Tell Sister the boy says it's urgent." He turned round again to the boy and said, " Always in a hurry, you folks are. You get inside, son, an' warm up a bit by the fire. Nurse'll be down presently." The boy pushed in boldly and stood by the fire, rubbing his dirty hands together and looking round him as if the place belonged to him. " Ain't I see you before round this place ? " inquired old Sawyer and the boy nodded. " Last summer when you was on day-duty I was comin' up to see Mr. Dyer, after I'ad me tonsils done. I remember you all right, Mister." " Ah ! I daresay you do," replied Sawyer cryptically. " There's more knows Tom Fool than Tom Fool knows. You wait there till Nurse comes down an' you can carry 'er bag. Pity they didn't send a bigger one." " I'm the biggest there is," the boy retorted. " Nigh on fourteen an' leavin' school at Easter ! " " When I was your age," said Sawyer, " I'd done with schoolin'. Went to sea at thirteen, I did. In my day there wasn't all this fuss about book-learnin'."

In a few minutes down came Rose Smith, one of the pupils in the midwifery school. She had her cloak and bonnet on already, she was a little round-faced thing, who had done her prescribed number of hospital deliveries, but was all in a flutter about her first case on the district. Old Sawyer looked hard at her, to impress her face on his memory, he prided himself on knowing all the pupil-midwives by sight. " You've a nice easy case to start on, nurse," said he, in his grandfatherly way. " Woman's had six before, she didn't ought to give you much trouble. Number Five, Castle Ditches, it is ; only a step, down the lane and round behind the Woolpack Inn. You don't know this town, do you ? but the boy will show you the way. Here, son, look alive ; take the bag and mind you don't drop it. There's a fine night of stars for you, nurse, but it's cold enough to starve the devil. You mind the ice on the puddles and keep your hands warm under your cloak till you get there."

He opened the outer door for them and cast a seaman's eye up to the winter constellations. Orion, the Leaning Man,

had got up above the housetops, he was standing almost upright on his feet and squaring his shoulders across the sky. The Pleiades were like a swarm of silver bees, the Milky Way was a white arch over the town. There was a long, roaring sound travelling across the sky, making the whole house of heaven tremble, seeming to shake the stars in their courses; heavy bombers, too high to be seen, going out again on a raid. "Ah!" said Sawyer, wagging his grey head, "the boys are off to Germany; can't you hear 'em?"

The girl slipped by him like a shadow in her black cloak, quivering with cold and fright, and the boy followed after. "See you back in a couple of hours, I reckon," Sawyer called after them. "If you want any help you send up a note, there's always somebody awake here." And he turned back, chafing his fingers, and sat down again by his fire. His kettle was singing nicely, and he mixed himself a dollop of Cocoa in a mug, poured on the water, stirred it round and drank it with slow appreciation, warming his hands on the cup, "These young things," he thought, "they must see some queer starts. She was all of a tremble, that one. Well, it's only natural. She'll get used to it presently."

3

The heat of the glowing fire soon made him drowsy. He slipped a little lower in his wooden armchair, his eyelids closed, and his breath puffed gently through his parted lips; it made a soft whistling noise. There was no other sound in the lodge for more than an hour, except the gentle collapse of the coals. Suddenly the quiet was torn in pieces by the drilling of the house telephone on the wall over his head. It mixed itself into the old man's dream, which had been of death and battle, he struggled in his chair and awoke with a start; but before he was fully awake he had jumped up in his stocking-feet and gone to answer the summons. The Night Sister's voice clacked in the receiver, small and distinct, as he nodded and repeated her orders; "Fetch down a dead body from Sydenham? Aye, aye, Sister, I'll get out the stretcher and come right up."

He replaced the receiver, looked round, sighed and shivered a little; the fire had gone down a good deal while he slept and the night was growing colder. It was getting on for two in the morning, a likely time for a man to die. The old sailor shrugged himself into his uniform coat, grumbling meanwhile at his own stiffness; he was growing very rheumatic these

days, though he did not like to admit it. He put more coal on the fire, smoothed down his grey hair with one hand and walked through into the out-patients' hall, a little withered man, still very light on his feet. The casualty nurse was sitting under the lamp as close to the stove as she could get, sucking a bullseye and yawning her head off, as she cut up a roll of pink lint into squares for next day's fomentations. "Mind the phone for me, will you please, nurse?" said Sawyer. "I got to go up to Sydenham and take a corpse down to the mortuary. I won't be above ten minutes." She said, "Right you are, Sawyer," and got up, glad to interrupt her dull routine and enjoy his fire. She flung her red cape about her shoulders and walked out to the porter's box.

Old Sawyer pulled the two-wheeled stretcher out from its place under the stairs. It was an awkward thing to handle, with its two big bicycle wheels, but he went padding along in his sandshoes at a brisk run, twiddling it round the corners with accustomed skill. He whistled to himself to keep up his spirits, as he went down the long silent corridor, between the dim winking reflections of the tiled walls and polished floor. "Oh . . . ooh; oh . . . ooh . . ." he sang to himself, quite unconscious of the noise he made, slapping down his feet with the trotting gait of his barefoot days at sea, and bowling along till he came to the lift.

When he got up to Sydenham he found what he expected to see; the deep darkness of the ward, the shaded green lamp on the centre table, the light and quiet bustle behind the pair of closed red screens. A nurse came scurrying out from between them, asking, "Is that Sawyer at last? We thought you'd be up before this." He made a grumbling noise at that, for he hated women fussing. Then Sister Mercer came out from the shadow behind him, making him start a little. He admired the tall woman, with her crown of white hair, who held her head like a queen, and to her he touched his forehead saying, "I come as quick as I could, Sister." She nodded and signed to the ward nurse, who drew the screens aside. He saw her young taut figure outlined against the red covering.

The body of the unknown man had been washed and laid out. As Sawyer worked the stretcher up to the bed, he saw the outline of stiff feet, side by side, of crossed hands and upturned face under the sheet clinging to them. He had been at this work for many years, and it meant little to him. With the help of the two women, the old one and the young one, he lifted the corpse on to the stretcher and stood ready

to wheel it away. "This is that sailor chap," he thought to himself; "the one that was brought in last night, about midnight. He's not been long dying."

As he moved out the young nurse folded back the screen again. He heard the Night Sister whisper to her, "Now then, nurse, get that bed stripped at once and take the clothes out to the annexe. Then empty the locker and carbolise the bedstead. I want everything cleared up before you go to supper." The dead man had sunk already, like the yellow Gulf weed that floats in the hollows of the sea; the wave of life had gone over him and passed on. As old Sawyer wheeled the stretcher down the ward he thought vaguely of a shrouded corpse tilted off the deck of a ship, going down feet first through the green water, disappearing without trace. The young nurse, scurrying before him, flung the big doors wide and the dead man was taken out of the ward.

Sister Mercer walked with Sawyer down the passage, keeping her hand on the bier. She had to go fast to keep up with the old sailor's trotting run and her cloak blew out behind her, so that when he turned his head to look at her she made him think of a ship in full sail. Once long ago, in some Eastern harbour, Singapore, or another, he had been strolling along under the rattling palm trees, in the burning sun, looking idly about him for something to please a young man's eye. Then he had seen one of the last of the old three-masted grain ships, going out of harbour, homeward-bound, with a figure-head in the shape of an angel, straining forward, with flying hair and lips that drank the spray. Sister Mercer made him think of the wooden woman as she moved beside him in her red cloak down the long tiled passage to the mortuary. It was a cold place to leave a man, Sawyer thought, cold as death; there was only one place colder and that was the grave itself, but to him it was as familiar as his own house. With the dexterity of long practice he shifted the dead sailor's stiffening body from the stretcher on to the slate slab. He talked to himself a little as he did it, grumbling aloud in his old cracked voice "Handsomely, now"; and "Easy does it"; for he had been so long on night duty that he liked the sound of his own voice and often talked to himself for company; but Sister Mercer was getting so deaf that she did not hear him. "There you are, shipmate," he said and stood back pleased with his own dispositions. He glanced round the harbour to which this unknown sailor had come to rest, the cold room, darkly gleaming and quiet, thinking to himself, as he often did, "I'd sooner be buried at sea."

Sister Mercer put out her hand and turned back the sheet from the dead man's face. Old Sawyer watched her do it, standing with his head cocked to one side, like an attentive dog. His lips moved, but he did not speak. The dead man stared up at the ceiling. His features looked small and transparent, the spirit which had animated them had fled away an hour earlier; there was nothing left but a bleached and brittle shell, such as you may pick up on any beach when the tide is out. Sister Mercer uttered a long sigh. "Yes," she said to herself, "I think that must have been my William," and she pulled up the sheet and turned away. Old Sawyer did not know what she meant. She walked out and left him. He switched off the hard single light, left the place in darkness and went away by himself down the long corridor, bowling the empty stretcher briskly before him, trotting back to the lodge. He returned to his fire, to his kettle and to his dozing over the newspaper. One night or another, they were all much the same to him.

4

Sometime afterwards he woke again with a start and a struggle, like an old dog roused from slumber and there was Sister Mercer. She had come into the lodge while he slept and was chafing her long hands before his fire. He asked her quickly, "Is anything the matter, Sister?" and she replied, "I'm worried about Nurse Smith. She's still out on that case in Castle Ditches." He looked at the clock, which showed twenty minutes to five. "She's been gone a long time," fretted Sister Mercer and he answered promptly, without a glance at his book, "Five past twelve she went out, I saw her go myself." "It should have been quite a straightforward case, too," Sister Mercer reflected. "I've looked up the card from the ante-natal clinic; the woman had had six children before and never any trouble. Nurse Smith ought to be back by this time." She worried about her girls more than she need, Sawyer considered; but of course it was a responsibility, say what you like, to have them down in places like Castle Ditches, uniform or no uniform. Sawyer had sometimes thought so himself. He said, "These people always send up long before there's any need, Sister," and she nodded at that, but fingered her lip nevertheless. "If the girl isn't back by five," she said, "someone must go down and see if there's any help wanted."

"She'll be back any minute now, I daresay," Sawyer told

her cheerfully, and even as he spoke there was a sound of footsteps. A quick knock came on the sliding shutter and as he opened the door in came Nurse Smith, bright eyed, flushed and triumphant, with frost on her shoulders and the night air in the folds of her cloak. Sister Mercer told her drily, "I was just going to send down and look for you, nurse. I thought something must have gone wrong. You should have been back long ago. You know you're supposed to send up a note if you're kept more than four hours at a case." Her deep soft voice, however, took the edge off her rebuke and little Rose Smith babbled happily, "I know, Sister, I know; but there wasn't anybody to send, and it was quite all right really. There wasn't anything wrong, only the poor woman hadn't much strength, and it wasn't any good trying to hurry her. I waited and waited and did what I could; I never noticed how the time was going. It was an awful house and such a dirty room; the walls were crawling. There were a whole lot of children about when I got there, but a neighbour came and took them away. The old grandmother wanted to help, but she had such grubby hands that I couldn't let her go anywhere near the patient. But I got the baby in the end," said Nurse Smith, with a hysterical giggle which threatened to turn into a sob. "It was a lovely baby."

"That will do, nurse," said Sister Mercer in her grave voice. "Go up now and sterilise the things in your bag. The steriliser's going in the labour ward; you'll find them still clearing up. Put fresh dressings in your bag and then get off to bed. You'll be on second call from eight o'clock till four to-day, so you can go down to Castle Ditches in the afternoon and get your visit done, if you aren't wanted for another case." The girl's mouth opened and shut and she seemed about to burst out laughing or crying, but when Sister Mercer told her quietly, "Run along now," she slipped away like an obedient shadow. Sawyer rubbed the top of his bald head and ventured, "She's a bit excited now, but she'll get used to it." "Yes," said Sister Mercer. "She'll get used to it soon enough. We all do."

5

Six o'clock struck again from St. Blazey's church, and a policeman passed on his usual beat round the corner. It was a dark frosty morning, and a mist had come up from the river to blot out the stars. He could hear an army convoy

grinding along down by the Abbot's Bridge and far overhead the insistent grumble of big bombers coming home from a raid. There was no light to be seen anywhere in the whole of the hospital building, except for the faint glow in the window of the porter's lodge, not bright enough for him to report. The hospital cat jumped through the railings with a mouse in her jaws and scurried out of sight. It was too cold to linger and he tramped on, beating his hands together in their woollen gloves, to get some warmth into his fingers, "Ah!" said he to himself, "it's an ugly old place, to be sure and there's plenty of folks will tell you it should be done away with. Well, they can tear it down if they choose, but they'll have to build it up again, in one shape or another. This town couldn't get on without Yeoman's Hospital." And he turned the corner and walked away down Abbot's Lane.

THE END